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## THREE PERSONS

BOOKS BY  
SIR ANDREW MACPHAIL

ESSAYS IN PURITANISM  
THE VINE OF SIBMAH  
ESSAYS IN POLITICS  
ESSAYS IN FALLACY  
THE BOOK OF SORROW  
IN FLANDERS' FIELDS (*biog.*)  
MARIA CHAPDELAINE (*trans.*)  
OFFICIAL HISTORY OF  
CANADIAN FORCES IN  
THE EUROPEAN WAR;  
MEDICAL SERVICES

# THREE PERSONS

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SIR ANDREW MACPHAIL



NEW YORK & MONTREAL

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## PREFACE

THESE Three Persons are Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson who reveals himself in his *Life and Diaries*; Colonel E. M. House, in his *Intimate Papers*; and Colonel T. E. Lawrence, less clearly, in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* and *Revolt in the Desert*. Each one is something more than a Person; he is the essence of that creation in which he lived and had his being; and all three have come voluntarily before the bar of history, bearing their confessions in printed books, babbling the truth with artless candour, not knowing the profundity of what they said.

Of the Great War, from which the world has not yet emerged, these are authentic documents; and one who is concerned with history cannot affect to believe that they do not exist. War is the central theme of history; the climax in the tragedy of national life. It does not come by accident; it is a natural aberration to avoid an obstacle which human negligence or fallibility has allowed to become insuperable. It is of that negligence and

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fallibility history takes account; for history is the conscience of the world in time, the tribunal which must hear the blood of the fallen crying from the ground for judgment upon the necessity and justice of the sacrifice. Therein lies the retribution upon the mighty—from corporal to military commander and civil statesman; the vengeance of the lowly and obedient. After their hour of greatness they are consigned to their own place.

Neither soldiers nor statesmen create war. They, and also those who are called upon to suffer most, allow war to break out because they think wrong about it, or do not think at all. The Germans thought wrong in 1914; the French in 1870. War always breaks out when it has become "unthinkable." In 1914, the director of British military operations wrote on July 27th, "I think there will not be any war." Within seven days, England was at war with Germany. In 1917, an American president was installed for a second term, on the sole ground that he had kept his country out of war, and would continue at peace. Within thirty days the United States were at war with Germany. In due course, humane England found herself unwittingly conducting a cruel war in Arabia, and her fame in that



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region committed to an artist in search of fresh emotions.

Not peace and war, but peace and massacre are antithesis, the one of the other; and it is the most pacific statesmen who have always allowed their countries to drift into the worst wars,—the peaceable Aberdeen, the rustic Lincoln, the absent-minded Salisbury, the righteous Woodrow Wilson, the wreckage of whose hopes now lies stranded at Geneva, the last refuge of every foreign fanatic from Jean Calvin to Jean Rousseau. Sir Edward Grey could not think aright about war because he thought of it with hatred. To Count Mensdorff he said over and over again, I hate it, I hate it. And yet, he should have reflected that war was implicit in the treaty with Belgium; he should have convinced himself and instructed the Empire that war with Germany was the very essence of that Convention which he with his exquisite nature approved, and Lord Lansdowne with his Flahault blood formulated with the French.

In the present mood of revulsion from war the danger is twofold: When war finally becomes unthinkable, as an ancient superstition, some fresh thinker from within or some invader from without

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will surely remember the ecstasy, adventure, and triumph of it,—passions that will always inspire man. When the smaller nations find themselves safely shackled by Conventions, they may dare all, as the soul of Hellas dared the bulk of Asia, preferring the hazard of war to the caution, dullness, and timidity of a peace enforced, and the *peine forte et dure* of physical weight.

The way of peace lies not in dreams and fiction, but upon the firm resolve of every nation, openly proclaimed, that there is an ultimate object for which it will fight. Upon a famous occasion, the peace of Europe was preserved by the unsentimental old man who at the moment had the honour of England in his keeping,—that was the man who brought Bismarck to bay by the menace: “Whatever happens, we will not drift into war: if we come to war, it will be because we intend it, and have an object to achieve.” Even the heavenly bodies move in peace by observing the balance of power. Descent into war is easy: the civil conduct of war difficult. These Three Persons will serve as a warning and a lesson. That is the intent of this book.

A. M.

MONTREAL,  
November, 1928.

### THIRD EDITION

IN this, the third edition, a studious reader may observe the removal of several printer's errors; the correct designation of military rank; a closer precision in certain statements and less definition of others; the expansion of various political and military themes, especially the Agreement with the French, and the final Campaign. But in striving for accuracy, the features remain untouched. If any Person, through his friends, were to protest that strong words are used in depicting his lineaments, the defence of *Electra* avails: You speak, not I; you do the deeds: your deeds find me the words. And the Master of Words has declared: "There is no room, and the world insists that there shall be no room, for mercy, for respect, for fear, when the record of the Tribe comes to be written." There is room for pity.

A. M.

MONTREAL,  
*March* 1st, 1929.



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# I. SIR HENRY WILSON

STRATEGIST—SOLDIER

—ADVENTURER—POLITICIAN

σύ τοι λέγεις νιν, οὐκ ἐγώ. σὺ γὰρ ποεῖς  
τοῦργον· τα δ' ἔργα τοὺς λόγους εὕρίσκεται.

[*Electra*, 624.]

*Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson, Bart., G.C.B., D.S.O.*  
*His Life and Diaries.* By Major-General Sir C. E.  
Callwell, K.C.B., with Preface by Marshal Foch.  
2 Volumes. (Cassell, 1927.)





FIELD-MARSHAL SIR HENRY WILSON,  
BART., G.C.B., D.S.O.

# I

## STRATEGIST

THE Irish have always had a sure instinct in murder. Sir Henry Wilson was an Irishman. He was murdered by two other Irishmen. But this murder was something more than an affair between themselves. The victim was a Field-Marshal of the British Empire; he had been Chief of the Imperial General Staff in the last months of the War, and was at the time of his death a member of the House of Commons. He was a shining mark, whose brilliancy is disclosed in his *Life and Diaries*, fresh from his own hand.

The book contains the assiduous record of this distinguished soldier. It is edited by the late Major-General Sir C. E. Callwell, also an Irishman; and he brought to the task the industry of an experienced writer and the devotion of an Irish friend. The diary, as displayed, demands with the explanatory comment 753 pages; it begins with the year

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1893, the volumes prior to that, and extending eight years further, having been lost. The editor found it expedient to omit some passages, and desirable to exclude certain expressions about individuals; but enough remains.

Sir Henry Wilson did achieve a high place. The evidence is in the public records and upon every page of the diary. He entered the War as Major-General; he emerged as Field-Marshal, Knight of the Bath, Baronet with a Parliamentary grant of ten thousand pounds. And it was not alone in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house that he had honour. His praise comes from emperor, kings, statesmen, soldiers. A legend has grown up that the War brought forth no great soldier, no great statesman. This diary disproves the first part of the allegation, and equally affirms the other. It will be convenient in the outset to assemble by categories the positive evidence in the very words of Sir Henry Wilson himself.

The Emperor of Russia, who was not personally acquainted with him, is reported by a trustworthy witness to have inquired, "Wilson? that is the very tall man? I hear he is of the first order." <sup>1</sup> The King

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of the Belgians, in his own capital, "said he knew the part I had played, and thanked me." Again he repeated the assurance, and was "charming and flattering." <sup>2</sup> The King of Italy in his own bedroom "begged me to accelerate assistance, and gave me both his hands in saying good-bye."<sup>3</sup> The King of Spain, after luncheon in his palace, "credits me with more power than I have, perhaps not more than I may have."<sup>4</sup>

General Nostitch in Russia "said that, if it had not been for me, the Germans would have been in Petrograd."<sup>5</sup> General de Castelnau, at dinner in the house of Baron de Neufise at Chantilly, said "in front of every one, that only for me England would never, could never, have gone to war, and therefore it was the literal truth that I had saved France." The diarist may well add, "a proud moment."<sup>6</sup> This testimony is so specific that it is revived on a future page.<sup>7</sup> "He told every one at Les Tilles, that I had saved France. I ought to be satisfied with these two expressions of opinion. And I am." General Nivelle "appealed to me 'in the name of God,' as I was the only man in England who could save a most difficult situation."<sup>8</sup>



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General Smuts described him "as the Hindenburg and Ludendorff of this country."<sup>9</sup> To Signor Orlando he was *le Rothschild des bons espoirs*.<sup>10</sup> On the way to Rapallo, as the train was passing Marengo, Lloyd George remarked to him, "You are our Kellermann, and you must save us in our desperate situation. If you cannot, then no one can."<sup>11</sup> When the Supreme Council of War was being set up in Versailles, M. Clemenceau "asked who Versailles was, and answered it himself by saying 'Monsieur Wilson.'"<sup>12</sup>

Dining with his own King, the Prince of Wales also being present, Lord Stamfordham "said that I was more responsible for England joining the war than any other man. I think this is true."<sup>13</sup> General de Castelnau kissed him at Mirecourt;<sup>14</sup> and at Doullens, "Foch kissed me twice in front of the whole crowd."<sup>15</sup> Finally, he came within a little of commanding the Canadian Corps.<sup>16</sup> The only voice lacking in this chorus of praise is the voice of an English soldier.

The justness of this high eulogy will be clear to any one who reads the diary of his activities on the field of battle in the first six weeks of war. The evi-



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dence is on every page, that it was he who turned the tide of battle on the Marne, although at the time he held the inconspicuous post of sub-chief of the General-staff, and the rank of Major-General. According to Lord Esher <sup>17</sup> "his prescience never failed. In that darkest hour, he is recorded to have said, 'The Germans are over-hasty. They are bound to make a big mistake. The whole thing is over-done.' Already he had divined the battle of the Marne." Divination was not enough. He had taken the proper measures to ensure victory by instructing the French in the tactics and strategy proper to the occasion.

As early as August 24th, General Lanrezac made a proposal for attack.<sup>18</sup> Wilson saw at once that "the thing is ridiculous, and is done to save his face." On the 27th, he transmitted to the French commander-in-chief a clear expression of his own views: "I told him how useless the present plans were. I told him to get all five corps up from Alsace."<sup>19</sup> It was equally sure that his own chief, Sir John French, had taken up "a ridiculous position." On September 4th, he went to see Franchet d'Espercy who had succeeded Lanrezac, "and it was agreed between

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them" what the plan for the battle of the Marne should be. When he returned that night he wrote in his diary,<sup>20</sup> "The above scheme seemed a good one, and I was all in favour of it, in fact it was, I think, my idea." But he found the conduct of Sir John French "simply heart-breaking." He "spent a miserable night," but at seven in the morning he "went to see him, and he too agreed." The battle of the Marne was won.

The full immensity of the victory, however, was only apparent on September 12th. The single point in dispute between Wilson and the French command was the date of entry into Germany. He thought four weeks; Berthelot three. Wilson then submitted the proposal proper in the event of the Germans being bold enough to stand on the Namur—Meuse—Thionville line, a rather vague proposal, it is true, "to attack everywhere. They agreed after much argument, and allotted the task to Foch. They were all perfectly charming to me and far too complimentary. What a different interview to that of August 30th! I am glad to think that, as a result of that interview, Lanrezac's army was saved. And this has been the cause of all our success." That was

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the memorable interview at which he had recommended Joffre to withdraw the corps from Alsace.<sup>21</sup>

In this happy interlude, General Wilson might well look back with complacency upon his labours during the first week of August, not only in dispatching the Expeditionary Force to France but, what was much more difficult, persuading and compelling the Government to send it at all. The record of those activities also is singularly full and clear. On the night of July 31st, he "began to suspect that the Cabinet was going to run away."<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, he had "Johnnie Baird write to Bonar Law begging him to come up and see Asquith." In the morning of Saturday, August 1st, at seven o'clock, he went with Sir Arthur Nicolson to see Sir Edward Grey. The Foreign Secretary was in bed, and could not be seen. On his return to breakfast, he found a company of two young ladies whose names are mentioned, the editor of an important monthly magazine, and General Rawlinson. Late the night before, Wilson had telephoned to this editor the fatal message, "We are in the soup;"<sup>23</sup> that would account for his presence at breakfast. He has since given a full account of "the inner history of this hectic junc-

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ture," from which it appears that "as there was no time to lose, we then and there constituted ourselves into an informal 'pogrom,' under the inspiration of the General." The personnel of this pogrom seems hardly imposing enough for events so important; but at any rate, "they got into touch with"—various persons.

In addition to all these activities, which were not exactly pertinent to his duties as Director of Military Operations, he went the day before to see General Vicomte de Panouse, the French Military Attaché, "and advised him to get Cambon to go to Grey to-night and say that, if we did not join, he would break off relations and go to Paris." <sup>24</sup> This does not seem to have been very wise counsel. To break off relations is a serious threat, and is a new method of diplomacy in seeking an ally. England was not at the time accustomed to being threatened by her friends. In any case, M. Cambon and Sir Edward Grey arrived at a decision by a less unusual course. But General Wilson was over-wrought. The strain had been too great. "An old friend found him in a passage in the Admiralty Building in tears." The last entry in the diary for the day reads,

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“Grey’s delay and hesitation in giving orders is sinful.” It is well known, however, that Sir Edward Grey in a published work gives rather a different account of his action. But the British Expeditionary Force sailed for France.

Such is the splendid figure that would have remained—Knight, Baronet with ten thousand pounds, Field-Marshal, the power that compelled and enabled England to do her duty, the Saviour of France and Russia—had it not been for the publication of these diaries. That figure would have remained for this generation at least, for the historians are slow and patient in their discovery of the truth.

The book is a cruel book. The cruelty lies not in publishing what Sir Henry Wilson says about others but in what he says about himself. What he says about others will be disbelieved or believed according to the taste of the reader: what he says about himself will be accepted as true; and the melancholy truth is that, whilst he says much of his greatness, he says little that is admirable. If, on his behalf, the wise rule had been observed, that a soldier’s diary may not be published without the consent of the

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War Office, any intelligent corporal-clerk would have saved him from himself.

It is cruel also because he has been permitted to expose to the world the foundation from which that greatness arose, and transform current surmise into posthumous certainty. Sir Charles Callwell might plead that if he had placed himself and his hero under this self-denying ordinance, the diary would have remained unpublished; but that is a contingency to be deplored less by his friends than by his enemies, for he must have had other enemies than those who struck him down. If an enemy had done this publication, it might fairly be alleged that any man's furtive scribbling, if wholly published, would do him discredit. But it must be rare for a friend to publish the writings of a friend, and thereby exhibit him as a public spectacle; and yet he has rendered to the Empire and to history a service greater than he knew.

It should also have been calculated how many neutral or ignorant readers might be converted into enemies by reading the book. The historian alone is oblivious to that risk. Sir Charles Callwell was under no vow to write history; yet in his voluntary



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work of piety in publishing these diaries, he has handed over the subject of them to the historians to be anatomized. It is upon them the duty falls. Even the book-reviewer has his own humble office. In self-defence, he may urge that he never reviews a book unless it is thrust under his notice by publication; often, not even then unless people are talking foolishly and falsely about it. And there has been much false and foolish talk about these diaries, especially by persons who have not read them. They have been used in unjust criticism of the French, in detraction of civil government, as proof that soldiers consider themselves superior to the State, and military force an enemy of civil power. That is not true, nor is it true that soldiers are at eternal enmity one with the other, the officers of the staff conspiring against the men fighting on the field.

It is equally false that the Army assumes a pre-arranged attitude of hostility to any race or people of His Majesty's subjects before they have declared themselves in open rebellion, which it proceeds to suppress without rancour, without civil hate. It is quite true that these diaries give colour and body to all these accusations, but that is personal to the

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writer and not of general validity. The essence of the British Army is loyalty to the King, support of His Majesty's Government, fidelity to comrades, submission of self to the common good, resolution in face of the enemy. If any one of the contrary qualities helped to procure for Sir Henry Wilson his high place, that was the result of adscititious circumstances which rarely occur and may never occur again.

There is in the editing a certain amount of sophistication by which the worse is made to appear the better. That may be forgiven to a friend, but by a historian the sophistry must be stripped away. And yet in midst of the sophistry the soldierly candour of the editor shines through; by comment and footnote he shows how mistaken the diarist was in his observation and deductions.

Lord Stamfordham had some reason for his statement that Sir Henry Wilson was more responsible than any other single man for England's going to war; but it was by the eternal force of events that England was driven to war; the power of any man to accelerate or retard was very slight. The issue had been settled ten years before. In any case, such



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a claim in itself, even if it were true, is not now held in high esteem. The man who can justly claim that he was the one most responsible for keeping his country from war is entitled to a hearing. The credit so glibly given to Sir Henry Wilson is precisely the charge that is laid against the German Kaiser in respect of his country.

Arising out of the Convention between the British and French governments formulated by Lord Lansdowne, of which Viscount Grey of Fallodon has written with passionate approval, there was bound to be a discussion of strategy between the military staffs. In January 1906, M. Cambon thought the moment opportune in view of certain possibilities, and Mr. Haldane authorized a definite correspondence, with the clear understanding that no action was involved. All was vague until the year 1911 when the Agadir crisis gave point to the military discussions. In July of that year General Wilson went to Paris, where he spent a day with the French High Command, and these mutual visits were exchanged at irregular intervals during the next three years. It was not unnatural that the French were willing to believe the best, that the British Expedi-

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tionary Force would be instantly at their disposal, and that England would be automatically committed to war at their discretion. It was natural too, when war broke out, that they stood aghast, as they discovered that the military conversations were "unofficial," and that the documents were all in order against their assumptions. On August 1st, at 11.30 a.m., Mr. Asquith was free to write formally reminding the War Office that the Government had never promised the French an Expeditionary Force. Whilst it is quite true that Mr. Asquith and the Cabinet as a whole were vague about these military manoeuvres, Lord Haldane and Sir Edward Grey were more fully aware. On August 9th, 1911, General Wilson, after his return from Paris, presented to them three points: "that we *must* join the French; that we *must* mobilize the same day; that we *must* send all six divisions. These were agreed to, but with no great heartiness." <sup>25</sup>

In all this conference with the French there was inevitable silence. "It had been necessary throughout to perform the work with the utmost secrecy. The fact that Wilson and some of his staff were in communication with the French had to be kept con-

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cealed. About half a dozen officers alone in all the War Office knew of what was in progress.”<sup>26</sup> At this point the diary fails us; but upon the fateful alliance with France and the consequent withdrawal of the Fleet from the Mediterranean it is brilliantly clear. The decision to withdraw was made “without permission of the Foreign Office, or Cabinet, and without discussion by the Committee of Imperial Defence.”<sup>27</sup>

When war did break out Haldane had the Expeditionary Force ready, although most shells were obsolete, as they were not designed for high explosives. The ominous question now arose in General Wilson’s mind, what was to be done with the Force? That was a question with which he had nothing to do. It was a question for the Foreign Office, the Prime Minister, the Cabinet, and the country. Sir Edward Grey has given a full account of the process by which a decision was reached. The decision was not easy. Time was required. This was the delay that reduced General Wilson to tears. He had aided and abetted the French in their belief. He had helped to incur that debt of honour which fell to others to be paid. When this came to light in

the awful glare of war, England did not find herself so free to abstain, or free to enter, as Sir Edward Grey makes out in his elaborate defence. England was already compromised. She was to that extent no longer a sovereign State.

The Entente by which England was implicitly bound had been signed on April 8th, 1904, by Lord Lansdowne and M. Paul Cambon. The Bill for the ratification of the agreement, the Anglo-French Convention Bill, was read in the House of Commons on May 31st, 1904, without a division. In the House of Lords the Bill rapidly passed through all stages by the end of the session on August 15th. In France the Bill was adopted by the Chamber of Deputies on November 13th, in face of some opposition. The Senate ratified the agreement by 215 to 37 votes. Sir Edward Grey read the Agreement with "a feeling of simple pleasure and relief. The gloomy clouds were gone, the sky was clear, and the sun shone warmly. To see what is pleasant; to understand and to be understood; to be friends instead of enemies; that was enough for me at the time; I felt as if there were some benign influence abroad." <sup>28</sup>

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This generous enthusiasm of Sir Edward Grey and the unwitting assent of the House of Commons without a division was not universal. "One man there was," he writes, "of great position in public life, who was an exception to the general approval; he made no secret to me that he thought it a mistake." This man, it appears, was Lord Rosebery. In the House of Lords, "one very powerful voice was raised in protest. Lord Rosebery uttered a serious warning, predicting that sooner or later it must lead to war."<sup>29</sup> Mr. Campbell-Bannerman, the Premier, under whom Grey was serving as Foreign Secretary, "was apprehensive lest the military conversations arising out of the Agreement might create an obligation." Mr. Asquith, the succeeding Premier, thought them "rather dangerous." On August 23rd, 1912, Mr. Churchill wrote to the Foreign Secretary: "Consider how tremendous would be the weapon which France would possess to compel our intervention if she could say, 'On the advice of and by arrangement with your naval authorities we have left our Northern coasts defenceless.' We have the obligations of an alliance without its advantages."<sup>30</sup> But best of all the French knew the implication of

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the Agreement, and none better than M. Delcassé. As practical politicians, he said, they had to choose between their Egyptian dreams and the claim to recover some day the lost provinces of Alsace and Lorraine; as sensible men they chose the latter.<sup>31</sup>

But after all, Sir Edward Grey was the chiefest asset of the Empire in the hour of decision. By his character and conduct he convinced all men—except John Morley and John Burns—that our immediate entrance into the War was wise, just, and inevitable. And the average Englishman is hard to convince. He does not wish to fight, but he will fight if he must. His mind is half way between the belligerency of the Bulgarian and the passivity of the Chinese. We know now what happened as a result of our entrance into the War. To speculate upon what would have happened, had we abstained, is a task beyond human endeavour. A problem of merely one infinity cannot be solved by finite intelligence. A problem such as this involves a multiple infinity, and God himself is not mathematician enough for that.

The real complaint against Henry Wilson is not that his strategy was secret and French but that it



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was false, and that he led, or forced, England into war by the wrong road in opposition to those who knew better. To appraise his conduct in this war will help in a future war when another confident guide assumes to lead. For this there is abundant material. A sure method of appraisal is to compare a new specimen with a fixed standard, be that standard small or great. Let us apply this method of trial to him, using Lord Kitchener as the measure of value.

The relation between Lord Kitchener and Sir Henry Wilson never was cordial. From his early days he had no high opinion of Kitchener's capacity. In March 1896, he was "mightily disgusted at the way things are going in Egypt." His own "propositions were only being partially carried out." One day he thinks "the Government have botched the Egyptian business." On the following day, he observes that "Kitchener has done a foolish thing in weakening Suakim too much."<sup>32</sup> But, as the editor scrupulously explains, troops had been promptly dispatched from India to replace those withdrawn. Lord Kitchener had not informed this young captain practising at Queen Anne's Gate; hence the

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disapproval. But in South Africa, this brigade-major was no better pleased with Buller. What Buller could be thinking of, it was impossible to imagine. He was sending troops on a fool's errand; it annoyed the brigade-major beyond measure; he thought it the most infernally idiotic thing that ever was done, and would prolong the war for months.<sup>33</sup>

Lord Kitchener first met Wilson face to face in 1909 at the Staff College. The meeting was not auspicious for that great soldier. "He attacked me," writes Wilson, "about trying to form a 'school of thought,' but he got no change out of me, and he really talked a great deal of nonsense."<sup>34</sup> This school of thought was the French school whose teaching turned out so disastrous to themselves as well as to us. The professors in that school taught that strategy is an affair of rules and principles which are not to be altered by new conditions, railways, new arms, new explosives, and all the mechanical implements of warfare. Their ideas were old, but they encountered new weapons. They had not learned trenches and wire from the Japanese and the Boers, nor high explosives from the Balkans. They were deceived by the appeal of Napoleon to history.



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That astute soldier read history because he knew that his enemies had read history too. He learned what was in their minds, discovered their rules and principles, and then formed a contrary practice of his own. His enemies in defeat complained that he broke every rule of war; that was precisely our complaint against the Germans. It does not follow, however, that breaking rules will win a war; a correct procedure must be devised. In so far as the British General-staff reflected on war, or thought of strategy as apart from the French, they had not proceeded further than the American Civil War. Their minds stopped short with Jackson's manœuvres. The General-staff was Wilson. And yet in England at the time were the only soldiers in the world—except the Japanese—who knew anything of war—Roberts, Kitchener, Haig, Robertson, French, Allenby, Plumer; that is, unless soldiering is a profession unlike any other profession, and can be learned by doing nothing of the thing professed. The British Army was handed over to an ally that knew nothing to face an enemy which fortunately knew little more.

Lord Kitchener on August 6th, 1914, took charge

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at the War Office. His first official act "excited Wilson's violent indignation," as it might interfere with Wilson's own arrangements. It turned out again that Wilson had misinformed himself. He was in that temper when Kitchener sent for him. On the previous day Kitchener, through the French Embassy had asked that a specially accredited officer be sent from France to consult with him. The officer, General Huguet, arrived in the morning. Wilson had a "long talk" with him, and the officer returned to France without having seen Lord Kitchener. As a result Kitchener was angry, angrier still because Wilson had told the French officer everything, and committed the Secretary of State to a decision he had not yet taken. Wilson's behaviour in this trying situation is described by himself, "I answered back, as I have no intention of being bullied by him, especially when he talks such nonsense." <sup>35</sup>

There was one more meeting with Lord Kitchener at the War Office, this time on August 12th, present, French, Murray, Wilson, and three French officers. <sup>36</sup> "There we wrangled with K. for three hours. K. wanted to go to Amiens, and he was in-

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capable of understanding the delays and difficulties of making such a change nor the cowardice of it. He still thinks the Germans are coming north of the Meuse in great force, and will swamp us before we concentrate." Apparently it was more important to go to the wrong place than to have Lord Kitchener "hopelessly messing up our plans."<sup>37</sup> The army concentrated at Maubeuge, not at Amiens. It was overwhelmed. The Germans did come in great force north of the Meuse. The word "cowardice" is not a nice word in the mouth of a soldier. The word is "not applicable," as they say in the army, to Lord Kitchener. He may well have consoled himself with the fable of "The Lion worn out with old age."

It required three weeks of disaster to convince the French Command that Kitchener was right in his selection of Amiens. On August 25th, Joffre, in acknowledging the failure of his "offensive manoeuvre," announced his fresh plan: "A new group will be formed in the neighborhood of Amiens." It was then too late. By September 1st, he was compelled to issue orders for a continuance of the retreat to the line of the Seine, south-east of Paris. The following day, he rejected the proposal of Sir John

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French to stand at the Marne: "I do not consider it possible to consider a general action on the Marne," and the English retreat was continued. Even Manoury's Sixth Army was withdrawn from Amiens, in panic over loss of Paris.

The record of a later interview with Lord Kitchener makes painful reading.<sup>38</sup> It occurred when Kitchener was in distress over the Dardanelles gamble into which he had been forced by powers beyond his control, and with little help, it must be admitted, from the First Sea Lord, Sir John Fisher, who went to the other extreme, and kept "an obstinate and ominous silence" when great issues peculiar to him were under debate: "He allowed me to contradict him as much as I like. Kitchener is frightened; he finds I am not afraid of him. Kitchener is frightened; the Cabinet is ignorant; Kitchener is ignorant."<sup>39</sup> And yet, a month later, Kitchener was not so frightened that he could not call Wilson to a sense of discipline and duty. In ordering this emissary upon a message, he wrote the stern direction, "No opinion of any kind must be expressed or suggested by you as to the wisdom or otherwise of whatever military policy may be

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adopted." Wilson adds, "After all this, I am to go and report to Kitchener. Rather amuses me." <sup>40</sup>

Yet it would appear that Kitchener was right not only against Wilson but against the French General-staff as well. On the authority of the editor, <sup>41</sup> "Lord Kitchener had come to the conclusion that the Germans intended to carry out the wide sweep in formidable force through Belgium north of the Meuse. For that wide sweep, determined by Von Schlieffen several years before, the French were wholly unprepared. It resulted in the entire left wing of the allied host being hustled back to the Marne in three weeks." Again, <sup>42</sup> "Those sanguine anticipations which the French General-staff had cherished for years had broken down completely. The consequences of the serious miscalculations as to the enemy's strength and intentions on the part of the French High Command have indeed been deplorable." Namur, the central stronghold, fell; Boulogne was useless; Paris was abandoned by the Government. The strategy for the British Expeditionary Force which Wilson had made a part of the French strategy fell into ruin.

At "the historic meeting of men, mostly ignorant

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of their subject," which Wilson describes under date of August 5th, 1914, the ignorant men were Lord Kitchener, Lord Roberts, Prince Louis of Battenberg, Sir Douglas Haig, Mr. Asquith, Sir Edward Grey, Mr. Churchill, six Generals and three Colonels, including Wilson himself. Various proposals were made, that now appear to have been so sensible that Wilson thought them "platitudes." Sir Douglas Haig was modest enough to ask questions, "and this led to our discussing strategy like idiots." <sup>43</sup> Inasmuch as the strategy that issued out of the discussion was not adopted, and the strategy issuing out of Wilson's discussion with the French High Command during the four previous years was adopted, and failed, it is an easy surmise that the idiocy lay elsewhere. The caution of ignorance is less dangerous than the rashness of presumption. We were all ignorant men, ourselves, the French, the Germans most of all; or rather bewildered children in the new world of war, willing to follow any guide if only he were vociferous enough in urging that he alone knew the way.

Sir Henry Wilson was Commandant of the Staff College from 1907 to 1910, and Director of Military



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Operations from that year until the War. During all that period he was in close, continuous, and confidential communication with the French General-staff. He above all men should have had a correct opinion upon the fundamental problems that faced the Empire, namely, the possibility of war, the duration and extent of it, and the number of troops that might be required. If he was wrong in this, his staff work was fantastic and his strategy grotesque.

He was wrong. Let us examine his diary, first upon the possibility of war—July 26th, 1914: My own opinion is that if Germany does not mobilize to-day, there will be no war. July 27th: I think there will not be any war. July 28th: At 3 p.m. a note came from Asquith ordering the “precautionary period.” I don’t know why we are doing it, because there is nothing moving in Germany. July 30th: War seems inevitable. July 31st: We are in the soup.

His judgment upon the duration of the war is equally clear and equally fallacious. August 5th, 1914: The editor condenses. He spent an hour and a half with Sir John French and Haig when the latter made the suggestion that troops ought not to cross the water for two or three months, during

which period "the immense resources of the Empire" could be developed. But Wilson pointed out that there were no resources for a long war, the view being very generally entertained that the contest would be a brief one.<sup>44</sup> September 13th, probably: Berthelot asked me when I thought we should cross into Germany, and I replied that unless we made some serious blunder we ought to be at Elsenborn in four weeks. He thought three weeks.<sup>45</sup> September 15th, Letter: If we drive in the force in front of us, we won't have any more trouble till we get to the Meuse.<sup>46</sup> October 3rd: I still think the war will be over in February or March.<sup>47</sup> October 26th: I still think we shall finish in the Spring.<sup>48</sup> May 4th, 1915: Joffre talked of getting to Namur, and the war being over in three months.<sup>49</sup> This was the official judgment of the British and French general staffs. It prevailed to the ends of the Empire. It governed the mobilization in Canada, for example, by methods which imposed to this day an extra debt of two hundred million dollars, and wrenched the constitution so that it has not yet recovered from the strain.

The number of troops that might be required was



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the next vital problem. Upon this, the diary is unmistakably clear. Equally clear is the editor of the diary that the diarist was wrong, and that Lord Kitchener was right. Lord Kitchener, he says, "entertained no illusions as to the potentialities of the British Expeditionary Force. He perceived that this little army would be totally incapable of exercising a decisive influence, and he perceived it before that little army had quitted the shores of the United Kingdom. But Wilson's influence with Sir John French's entourage was strong. He consistently and effectively ridiculed the Secretary of State's designs and intentions. General headquarters followed his lead." <sup>50</sup>

Under date of September 15th, 1914, the diary contains this entry, written from France, when the war had been in progress for six weeks: "Kitchener's shadow armies, for shadow campaigns, at unknown and distant dates, prevent a lot of good officers, non-commissioned officers, and men from coming out. It is a scandalous thing. Under no circumstances can these mobs now being raised, without officers, and non-commissioned officers, without guns, rifles, or uniforms, without rifle-ranges or training grounds,

without supply or transport services, without *moral* or tradition, knowledge or experience—under no circumstances could these mobs take the field for two years. Then what is the use of them?” Two days later he wrote: “His ridiculous and preposterous army of 25 corps is the laughing-stock of every soldier in Europe. It took the Germans 40 years of incessant work to make an army of 25 corps with the aid of conscription; it will take us to all eternity to do the same by voluntary effort.” <sup>51</sup>

And yet, within sixty days, from three thousand miles overseas a Division of those “shadows” was coming, and to the German soldiers at Ypres they were not a laughing-stock. On April 22nd, they bore the brunt of the attack with poisonous gas, which would have been new and strange even to real soldiers, and Ypres was saved. “But he could not withhold his admiration of the enemy’s General-staff for accomplishing so much under the conditions that existed at the time” <sup>52</sup>—this is the comment of the editor who, in proof, recites the diary for that day: “The Germans did this by those noxious gases and without reinforcements, for they have none,” he wrote home, “and so it was a very

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fine performance.”<sup>53</sup> This letter was to an English-woman, herself a childless woman—and Canadian mothers weeping for their children. In all these 753 pages of diary this commendation of the German General-staff is the only hint that nearly half a million Canadians were engaged on the Western Front. Of those at Vimy there is one single line, and yet the terrain they captured must have been familiar, as it had been lost to the Germans by General Wilson himself in May 1916, when he commanded the IV Corps. He merely admits, “this is a good beginning towards the 300,000 prisoners that I want this summer,” he at the time being liaison officer with the French. Neither Australians nor New Zealanders came under the notice of this Imperial chief. Their name does not live even in the index.

War breeds lies as the earth breeds worms. That was a saying of Napoleon’s, and he should know. In the vain attempt to deceive the enemy we succeeded in really deceiving ourselves. Retreat was victory; disaster triumph; to turn away was a clever stroke in naval tactics. People really were persuaded that this retreat to the Marne was the original plan of strategy, but it was carefully concealed from them

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that the plan cost 500,000 men. In this retreat from Mons, heralded at the time as "a defensive battle," one point of light emerges, when Smith-Dorrien "turned upon an enemy of at least twice his strength, struck him hard, and withdrew practically without interference." That is the verdict of the official "Military Operations, 1914." This decision to stand and fight instead of continuing to retreat was in direct opposition to his orders from headquarters, although finally Sir John French, "who did not quite grasp what it involved, and in spite of all I could say, agreed." Wilson adds the jealous words: "This will lead to disaster, or ought to." <sup>54</sup>

And the cause of the defeat at Mons, he alleges, was the decision of the Cabinet to retain two divisions in England. "If the Cabinet had sent six divisions instead of four this retreat would have been an advance and defeat would have been a victory"; <sup>55</sup> "it is criminal and sinful." <sup>56</sup> They had "lost the finest opportunity of the war, owing to nothing but absolute incompetence. They were now being thrust on the defensive. It was maddening and perhaps disastrous." <sup>57</sup> And yet it must have been easier to extricate four divisions than six, unless indeed those

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six were able to arrest and defeat the whole invading German army. At any cost the Government must be put in the wrong.

A soldier may be "all right in fighting," as Sir John French said of Sir Douglas Haig,<sup>58</sup> and yet not be a competent staff-officer; but a competent staff-officer must be a soldier. Haig was both. Wilson was only the one. There was a gulf between them. They were for ever estranged by Wilson's preoccupation with civil government and his magisterial function as a teacher of young men in the Staff College, by which he lost sight of the executive duties proper to a staff-officer. A man may be a professor, and have no experience in the application of the principles he professes to teach. With the profound instinct of the Army the instructors in the Staff College prior to 1904 were classified as professors. But a professor must have for his function a subject that is a science, and War is not a science in the sense that the theory can be divorced from the practice. Sir Henry Wilson was a professor of war; he was an inveterate lecturer with pointer, maps, and diagrams.

Three years before the War began, he gave a course of instruction to the Cabinet. He laid out

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the forces of the triple and dual alliances on the frontier; he put all his big maps on the wall, and lectured for an hour and three-quarters. He was profoundly dissatisfied with Grey and Haldane; they had no grasp of the subject; but he was rather hopeful of Winston.<sup>59</sup> In any case, England was not so unprepared for war in 1914 as many critical persons have assumed. The Cabinet had had lectures, but unfortunately the professor was wrong in his thesis.

An entertainment which pleased this instructor in strategy was "playing a war game," but he never had full scope for the exercise until he went to Versailles. There he had one half his young men represent the allies and the other half the enemy. He played the game for Sir William Robertson, and showed him the maps besides. "He was a good deal knocked about by all this."<sup>60</sup> The Americans were even more affected. "Bertie Studd and Hereward played the game for them, and they were immensely struck by the whole thing. Bliss told me that we had made out an overwhelming case for America helping us with every single man possible in every possible shape. So," he concludes, "we did a real



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good morning's work." <sup>61</sup> But wars are not won by games. Indeed General Rawlinson who "had two hours of his doings, running a war game on large scale maps," feared they were liable to lead to false conclusions.

Sir Henry Wilson's one performance in which there is some appearance of reality was his enthusiasm for a General-staff in 1905; but the scheme had been under discussion since the time of the Hartington Commission of 1888-89, and was further developed by the Esher Committee in 1904. It was really accomplished by Lord Haldane with Sir Douglas Haig as his adviser. Wilson claims to have written the paper for it, although the Secretary of State for War issued the scheme as his own. The idea was to gather the ablest men in the army and make sure that the fortunes of the army were always in their hands; "to form a school of military thought." As things then were, the advice tendered to the Cabinet was the individual opinion of the officer concerned and not the carefully balanced opinion of experts. <sup>62</sup> Under the new plan the Chief was to be the sole adviser, and Wilson himself in time became that one; but the experts appear to

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have been forgotten. When such advice was urgently required in August 1914, experts like Kitchener, Roberts, Haig, French, Grierson, and the Admirals of the Fleet, were entirely at variance, and, according to Wilson, talked like idiots because they did not talk like him.<sup>63</sup> It is little wonder that this "historic meeting of men, mostly ignorant of their subject," broke up as ignorant as when it convened.

At every crisis of the War he was ready with a paper; and these papers were written with the facility of a professor and the lucidity of a mathematician, who, as one of themselves has said, begins by assuming a set of illusions from which fresh illusions are developed. His most comprehensive paper is on the Dardanelles.<sup>64</sup> "Let the Dardanelles be forced," it begins, "a by no means difficult operation, if gun and rifle fire are not too great." The events that "may" follow then pour out like items from a machine. The paper on the Western Front is equally convincing: "To break the German line is not only an operation of war, but a certain operation of war, given sufficient troops and sufficient ammunition."<sup>65</sup>

His most elaborate strategy was propounded in a



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paper written on October 21st, 1918, in which he "showed that if Turkey gave in, and we had free access to the Black Sea, we could presently develop an attack from the Danube of 50-60 divisions, that this would knock out Austria, and then we could move into Germany from south and west and defeat the Boche armies on Boche territory." <sup>66</sup> Sir Douglas Haig's plan seems much simpler, and it succeeded within the next few days. As Foch once said to him, "Mais, mon cher Wilson, nous sommes militaires, pas avocats." This Danube plan was merely a reflection from the mind of Galliéni. The Expedition to Salonika was proposed by him in February 1915, as the first move for an attack on Constantinople, from which an advance could be made up the Danube. The proposal was abandoned, not on military grounds, but through Joffre's jealousy of Galliéni, whom he never forgave for his successful stroke at the German right flank and the deliverance of Paris.

In June 1917, when the French had recoiled with Nivelle's defeat, "he did his best to impress upon the War Cabinet and upon Robertson the vital importance of gaining a striking success somewhere, either

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in the field or else as a result of robust diplomacy.” To Lloyd George he told with all the strength he could, “If we can’t get a military success then we *must* get a diplomatic success. We *must*.” <sup>67</sup> He now entered the diplomatic field, and “earnestly begged Churchill not to bother his head about tanks and rubbish of that sort, but to cut out diplomatically Turkey and Bulgaria, which we could do, and at one blow destroy all the German eastern dream.” <sup>68</sup> Sir Edward Grey with a larger experience was not so hopeful. He did not believe we were mesmerists enough to think Turkey away from Germany or the German armies out of France.

It is doubtful if these papers and discoveries were of much value to civilians, soldiers, or diplomats, but the author appears to have had better success with the French. He found General Huguet “in the depths of despair, and soon roused him by showing him that if the Boche knocked out the Russians, he could not keep the Austrians in the ring, since—; nor the Turks, since—; nor the Bulgarians, since—. And if the submarines won, we were beaten: if we mastered the submarines, Germany was beaten” <sup>69</sup> all of which is in the best mode of the oracle. Next

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day, he saw General Pétain, and was even more “pleased and proud.” That General showed him a letter he was writing to Haig, “which he would not sign until he had shown it to me, and I approved.” The letter contained an opinion that a proposed attack by Haig “was certain to fail.”<sup>70</sup> His strategy was a thing on paper. If the Cabinet would only decide about Russia, he would make a plan of campaign from Finland to the Caucasus.<sup>71</sup> When a small British force was safely withdrawn from Baku, “that is a bother, as it breaks the chain from Baghdad to Archangel.”<sup>72</sup> Again, “the movement was good, but the expense was great,” as five trenches were taken and four lost with 1500 men. But war is not so abstract as that. The terms, trenches and men, are not of the same category.

One who talks and writes continually, and writes and talks only platitudes, soon gains a reputation for prescience. When the Hindenburg line was finally broken by sheer fighting, Sir Henry Wilson could turn back the pages of his diary and read with conviction what he had written at Ypres on October 13th, 1914, “We must push, push, push.”<sup>73</sup> If happily, “a real Conservative party” ever were formed,

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Sir Henry could point to his diary of January 1922, where he wrote, "I am sure this is the right thing to aim for." Indeed at this moment "Lady Londonderry is working hard to this end,"<sup>74</sup> and if there arose the Pitt or Bismarck for whom he was crying out, he would be right again, for he had written, "I believe if they could get a fine leader it is a real possibility." Lord Montagu of Beaulieu at a Cabinet meeting passed him a note on which was written, "I wonder how long it will be before you say with a chuckle, 'I told you so.'"

There are different ways for arriving at the same end. In the War two opinions developed. The soldiers, like Haig and Robertson, favoured the Western Front. All others believed that a decision could be reached in other areas. These two opinions were in direct opposition, since the forces available did not permit the double experiment being tried. Sir Henry Wilson held both opinions at the same time. On March 17th, 1915, he wrote as clearly as Haig or Robertson could have written:<sup>75</sup> "The way to end this war is to kill Germans and not Turks. The place where we can kill most Germans is here, and therefore every man and every pound of ammuni-

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tion we have in the world ought to come here. All history shows that operations in a secondary and ineffectual theatre have no bearing on major operations, except to weaken the forces there engaged." But he lost sight of this principle, and adopted a contrary one, "The Boche could not get a decision against us; we could not get one against him in the west; therefore we ought to try and knock out the Turk."<sup>76</sup> How the Turk was to be knocked out was equally clear, "We ought to push about like the devil in the Caucasus, and if possible push on in Palestine."<sup>77</sup>

His plan was "to take troops away from France during the mud-months, and land them on the coast of Palestine."<sup>78</sup> These "five months of mud and snow from the middle of November to the middle of April during which we can do nothing," he "rubbed into" Lloyd George on August 23rd, 1917.<sup>79</sup> In the winter following, the Germans and Gough's Fifth Army discovered that March is not a mud-month when nothing could be done on the Western Front; Vimy Ridge had been carried in the first half of the previous April. This was one of "the mad schemes of Lloyd George which terrified

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Haig and Robertson.” Most of Lloyd George’s mad schemes originated in “the great brains”<sup>80</sup> of Sir Henry Wilson. In October 1917, “Lloyd George is mad to knock the Turk out during the winter on the plan I explained to him on August 23rd, his difficulty being that Haig was hostile and Robertson was mulish, which he thought maddening. He wanted to know my advice. I repeated all I had said on August 23rd, and expressed the strong belief that if a really good scheme was thoroughly well worked out, we could clear the Turks out of Palestine and very likely knock them completely out during the mud-months, without in any way interfering with Haig’s operations next spring and summer.”<sup>81</sup> Had Haig been less hostile and Robertson less mulish, and the British army in Palestine rather than on the Western Front in March 1918, which was Wilson’s “mud-month next spring,” the War would have been lost instead of won.

As late as June 18th, 1918, Sir Henry Wilson gave a lecture to the Imperial Cabinet, which lasted seventy minutes, in which he explained “that no decision on the west can now give a decision on the east, so we must get a decision in both theatres.”<sup>82</sup>



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On July 1st, he thinks that "after the mud in November we ought to be quite safe." <sup>83</sup> We were, but for quite other reasons. Haig was keeping his own council. It was only by accident Wilson heard of "the big attack" that began on September 25th and culminated at Cambrai. All military writers make much of the strategical vagaries of Lloyd George. These vagaries were the vagaries of Sir Henry Wilson and had their origin in his mind.

Sir Henry Wilson had not the intellectual equipment of a strategist nor the educated intelligence that enables a real soldier to make war from a contour map and history. There is evidence that in school he was incapable of making much use of the books he had. He failed twice to pass for Woolwich, and three times for Sandhurst. In July 1884, he was entitled to examination for a direct commission, and on October 16th, his name appeared fifty-eighth on the list of successful candidates. Ill-luck in examinations dogged him; in March 1895, he failed to pass for interpreter in German. It can well be imagined how he would laugh off "these mishaps when he came to hold appointments that were

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largely concerned with military studies." But defeat in war cannot be laughed off.

He never was a soldier in the sense of consorting directly with fighting men and being of them, excepting for a few months in Burma on frontier patrol. His service dates from December 1882, when he was gazetted lieutenant in the militia, known in those days as the back-door of the Army. In time he was promoted for India. "This is a terrible upset," he writes, "went and saw Military Secretary, who is afraid nothing can be done." A medical board gave him four months' respite.<sup>84</sup> In the interval "he played a good deal of polo, and was generally galloping for some general."<sup>85</sup> But he never went to India again. In South Africa he was a brigade-major, and upon his return entered the Intelligence Department of the War Office, but for a short time he did command a provisional battalion in Colchester.

He never looked war in the face, never looked upon a stricken field or felt the thrill of victory at the moment when it comes. There is not in the whole book the faintest fellow-feeling or sign of sympathy with those who are about to die, not a



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suggestion that the reality of war is in the front line and there alone. In all his fleeting and fugitive visits to France, he rarely penetrated beyond general headquarters. Even when he commanded a corps he does not confess to having entered a front trench even from motives of curiosity. Of the dark background of war, the regimental aid-post, the dressing station, the field-ambulance, the casualty clearing station, he appears to have known nothing. The dead, the dying, the wounded, the sick, for him had no existence. He does not appear to have seen a single soldier and not an officer under the rank of major-general. War to him was a game like a game of chess.

The French strategy, commonly known as Plan XVII, to which the English committed themselves without reserve, was a mistake. It would be safer to say that they had no plan. They had merely a few formulæ which sound well in French, but have less meaning in English. These formulæ were, *Offensive à outrance*; *élan*; *Attaquez, attaquez, attaquez*; elaborated in the dogma ascribed by Captain Liddell-Hart to Foch,—whose “Reputations” is the most complete single book on the War,—*Mon*

*centre cède; ma droite recule; situation excellente; j'attaque.* To this may be added, *la violence, la brutalité, la rapidité*, of Nivelle, and *à la baionette* of Grandmaison. By the year 1917, forty French Divisions had come to the conclusion that success in war does not lie alone in the psychology of the Staff, but also in the human bodies of the troops. That was Pétain's discovery when he was called to the command of a crumbling army.

"Depend upon it, sir, when a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind." When soldiers know they are going to their death that very night, they develop an amazing perception of the circumstances which have predetermined the event. To them it is a very personal affair: to the superior mind it is merely an insignificant incident in a military manœuvre. The French soldiers always brought this concentration of mind to bear upon the tactics in which they were humbly but so intimately concerned. After Nivelle's disaster, fifteen corps were intelligent enough to record their dissent in one splendid mutiny. English soldiers have never been gifted in this form of intelli-

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gence, and our High Command was bereft of that most decisive instruction. Paschendaele was the result.

If there was a plan, even Joffre appears to have known nothing of it. When he was summoned before a committee of inquiry in 1919, the utmost of his admission was, "A plan of operations is an idea in one's head, but which one does not commit to paper." When pressed for confirmation of the statement, he could only add, "There may have been plans, but it was not I who made them"; and finally, "You ask me about a mass of things. I cannot answer. I know nothing about them." In this maze, military, political, religious, Sir Henry Wilson lost his way. The British Expeditionary Force followed him to disaster.

He was the idol of the French, but their idolatry is roughly shaken by these diaries. From faith they have passed to defence, and from defence to the scepticism of confession. M. Naudeau is the best exponent of the mood, when he writes, "*Que Sir Henry Wilson ait pu être une personnalité ambitieuse, envahissante, orgueilleuse, convaincue de son infallibilité, et mêlée constamment aux plus extra-*

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ordinaires intrigues, voilà ce que nous ne chercherons pas à contester."<sup>86</sup>

The covenant between ourselves and the French was sealed in blood. The worst we said of one another in secret during the strain of those years has been made public by an indiscreet friend; yet the covenant endures. That is the test of fidelity. The publication of these diaries is justified. That is a justification also of this present book. The air is now clear.

## II

### SOLDIER

SIR HENRY WILSON's single adventure of Command in the field of war is described in a chapter of twenty-eight pages, although the strictly military operations demand only six. He took over the IV Corps from Rawlinson on December 22nd, 1915, south of Bethune, with 70,000 troops of all ranks. "The enemy was comparatively quiet," and on the last day of the year he found time to drive to St. Omer to a dinner for General Huguet, "who made a charming little speech and kissed me on both cheeks." Three days later he went on leave to London, "where he had interviews with a number of prominent people." He returned to his command on January 30th, after nearly a month's leave, and found that one of the divisions in his absence had been transferred to another Corps.

The next incident occurs on March 12th, when his headquarters were moved to Ranchicourt, "a de-

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lightful château planted down in a fine park traversed by a trout stream." Unfortunately, on the 20th, "the Boche put 300 shells on the left brigade, and another 300 on a dummy battery." These shells do not appear to have done any harm, but the commanding officer was extremely irritated because he was prevented from making an equally useless reply. "It is perfectly maddening," he writes, "to have to undergo these things, while old Asquith and his crowd sit in London and do nothing." But firing shells is an expensive method of soothing an irritated commanding officer.

He saw "only one solution to our impossible position, and that is to get rid of Asquith. He will lose this war if he possibly can, by simply doing nothing. No ammunition, no trench mortars, no rifle grenades, no air-craft guns, no sausage balloons, no recruits, no huts, no light railways, no war. And the whole of this and no blockade, no foreign policy, no Irish policy, no tariff policy, no peace policy after the war, no financial policy, no savings, no retrenchments, no Zeppelins, no going to war, no intention to go to war, these and a thousand other things are

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entirely due to Asquith and his brood.”<sup>87</sup> His mind was not in his work.

This is the height of language entirely. O’Connell and his fish-wife together could not do better; but writing in a diary as a vent for spleen is less expensive than firing shells into the void; it is equally efficacious and equally useless. It turned out, however, that there was plenty of ammunition for any present useful purpose, and large reserves were being prepared for an impending battle. Sir Henry wrote to the Minister of Munitions on the subject, who appears to have sent a soothing reply, for he writes in return, “I see the limitations imposed come therefore from G. H. Q. Why the devil G. H. Q. couldn’t tell us this, I don’t know. You would think we were all children.” Possibly G. H. Q. thought we were soldiers content to await and obey orders, without defamation of His Majesty’s Government whose soldiers we were. Possibly, too, G. H. Q. was mistaken in that belief, and some of us really were screaming children.

At the end of April, he went on leave again, and nothing of especial interest occurred until May 20th, when he took over from General Byng “some line



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about the western slopes of the Vimy Ridge." On this first day in that important area, he occupied himself by taking the Archbishop of Canterbury on to the Nôtre Dame de Lorette heights to watch the gun-fire.

Those Germans had a curious prescience of these changes of command and even the very name of the new commander who came to oppose them; but it could only be a coincidence that next day the blow fell. Sir Henry "could only get contradictory and unsatisfactory reports as to what had actually been happening in the front line. Only late at night did it transpire that 1200 yards of the trenches had been lost and the whole line thrust back 300 to 600 yards. Owing to the dust and smoke that obscured the view, some doubt has ever since existed as to the hour at which the assault was actually delivered, for no one from the doomed companies in the front line returned to tell the tale."<sup>88</sup> That doubt has since been removed. The hour was 9.45, German time, 7.45, British time.

Had Sir Henry Wilson been as disinterested a spectator as he was at Ypres, when the Canadians were assailed by gas, he would doubtless have



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considered this capture of Vimy Ridge another "fine performance" on the part of the German staff; but he was not now so expansive. "A nasty little knock" is his appraisal of the disaster.<sup>89</sup> Vimy Ridge was lost and remained lost until it was retaken by the Canadians in the following year.

According to the editor, Sir Henry at once prepared plans for retaking the lost trenches on the following night. General Monro persuaded him to defer. Wilson would have preferred to carry out his own plan, but he gave way. Sir Douglas Haig suggested yet further delay. Monro instructed Sir Henry to carry on. But a serious hitch occurred. One of the two brigades did not start; the other after recovering some of the lost trenches was driven out of them again. Monro sent orders to stop any further attempt. Wilson thought this a mistake. It was eventually adjudged best to leave the enemy in possession of the ground captured. "But it was something of a misfortune for Sir Henry that the one really important occurrence that signaled his term of command of the IV Corps should have been this minor set-back." <sup>90</sup> "Minor set-back" might appease

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the public at the time; it deceives no one twelve years after.

Upon this misfortune the diary is silent, save for this: "By a savage bombardment I have been knocked out of rotten trenches which we only took over on Sunday morning. Our casualties have been 1200 to 1500." But even this did not disturb his "equanimity," lessen his "optimism," or relax his "nerve." As ever, he found good in evil, especially when the evil happened to himself and not to a rival: "This ineffectual and rather costly attack on me at Vimy is a sign of the Boche plunging about and losing his head. Yes, I see signs of loss of head."<sup>91</sup> In the Battle of Jutland also he found good: "Our navy is just beginning its course of instruction. This will wake up the English people."

For some mysterious reason, the Corps commander found his troops drifting away. Early in the year the 16th Division was transferred. After the "ineffectual attack" upon him at Vimy, two more divisions went, then two heavy batteries. Finally his corps went into reserve, with "headquarters at Domart; but Wilson with his personal staff located themselves at the Château de Vauchelles, some little

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distance away; the corps for the moment consisted only of headquarters, having no divisions, and this gave its commander a good deal more leisure than he had been recently enjoying.”<sup>92</sup>

Fate, sheer bad luck, circumstance, are all invoked to explain this enforced leisure. The explanation is much simpler. Sir Douglas Haig and Sir William Robertson were the immediate powers, and both in time paid heavily for their interference with this favourite son of the gods. He had powerful friends who warned him in time. A Cabinet Minister informed Duncannon, who in turn told Wilson, “how nearly I was *dégommé* after May 21st, and how I was saved by Charlie Monro putting in a tremendous report in my favour.”<sup>93</sup> Few soldiers are great enough to make such a confession.

But the period of military reverses, humiliation, and leisure held compensations. When Sir John French left the Field, the French military representative, General Huguet, “captured his highly efficient chef and forwarded him to Wilson,”<sup>94</sup> who installed him first at Labussière, and finally at Ranchicourt in that delightful château in the fine park by the trout stream. “Few days there were on

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which there were no guests at luncheon or dinner, or at both." A partial list includes Clemenceau, Robertson, Foch, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Haig, Kiggell, Reading, Lloyd George, Sir A. Lee, Castelnau. The breakfast for Clemenceau was "sumptuous—porridge, kippers, bacon, eggs, strawberries, cream."

The conduct of Castelnau must have been especially consoling at a moment when his host was being denied a higher command which was given to a junior, just because "Haig would not have it." <sup>95</sup> "Castelnau was perfectly charming to me, and in front of every one at dinner said that, only for me, England would never, could never have gone to war, and therefore it was the literal truth that I had saved France. A proud moment." <sup>96</sup>

Fortunately for Sir Henry Wilson at this moment, Lloyd George and Sir Douglas Haig reached the same conclusion, although by different routes. Lloyd George thought "it was ridiculous his still commanding a corps, reporting to Haig that he had raided trenches, 'and taken two prisoners'." <sup>97</sup> Haig's opinion of his fitness to command a corps was equally clear when he found himself high and dry

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without troops to command. As a result he was sent on a wild-goose chase to Russia. The mission ended in failure. "The Emperor and Empress made it quite clear that they would not tolerate any discussion of Russian internal policies"; <sup>98</sup> and General Gourko, "that vain talkative devil," interfered on the military side.<sup>99</sup>

This was the moment also when the French Government was dissolving, the High Command in confusion, and General Nivelle marching to his doom. Sir Douglas Haig found contact difficult, and sincerely thought Wilson might be of some assistance as liaison officer at Chantilly. He, if any, was fitted for the task of composing the French mind. He spoke their language. For ten years he had been in confidential relation with all the conflicting generals. He liked the French, and they liked him. He was not an Englishman. They opened their hearts to him. Foch was intimately playful; he always called him *Henri*; and in time his more assiduous English friends learned to address him as '*Onri*, because he liked it.

His satisfaction was complete when he was adopted as a Frenchman by General Nivelle, who

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spoke to him in the utmost confidence against Pétain, "adding that luckily there were no foreigners in the room—for which I thanked him, for it really was a charming remark." General Castelnau also was "very open though he said he could not speak to any other Englishman alive like that except me. He thinks the English are amazingly slow in helping in men and ammunition, and cautious to a degree in action."<sup>100</sup>

General Joffre at dinner in his own headquarters at Chantilly on March 23rd, 1915, "said in rather a loud voice, 'Eh bien, votre chef est assomnant.'" This met with general approval. Joffre was mistaken in his strategy, but he could not be mistaken in his French. If he used any such word it might have been *assommant*, which would mean in the jargon of the day, Your chief is a dud,—in civil parlance, a bore.<sup>101</sup> But Wilson never flinched. Later in the evening "came a strong attack upon Sir John French. I told him to give us orders, but without appearing to do so, to refer to Sir John's loyalty, and to leave the rest to his good heart—and me."<sup>102</sup>

That stern moralist, Sir Almeric Fitzroy, met Wilson and Rawlinson in the Travellers' Club at



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the time when Rawlinson was about to replace Wilson at Versailles. He congratulated Rawlinson, but allowed "that it was a position requiring more suppleness than was perhaps usual in men of the British race, whereupon Wilson grasped my arm and asked me what I meant by the term."<sup>103</sup> More specifically. "An intimate friend of his has written, 'In London, he was a black Ulsterman, and anti-papist; in Belfast he preached moderation'."<sup>104</sup> This clue "suppleness" is worth following as a guide towards his success with the French as well as to the height of splendour which he achieved, taking the term "in its most complimentary sense," as Sir Almeric assured him he did.

When Wilson was intermediary between Sir John French and General Joffre the liaison was difficult, and demanded the utmost frankness. In a conversation between French and General Lanrezac of the Fifth Army—that is, if the term can be applied to a sequence of utterance which neither understood—at Rethel on August 17th, 1914, an officer who was present reports,<sup>105</sup> that "the conference ended with the usual compliments and bowings and hand-shaking." This happy issue was the



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result of Wilson's adroitness in translating not what was said but what he imagined should be said. Sir John French was informed that the enemy had reached the Meuse, and quite reasonably inquired of their further intentions: *Pourquoi sont-ils arrivés? Mais pour pêcher dans la rivière.* Sir John did not understand the troubled reply, and Wilson translated, "He says they are going to cross the river." Again, at a conference between Joffre and French at Brias on May 12th, 1915, "both were getting hot." Joffre made a remark "which luckily Sir John did not catch, and I got the chance of interpreting wrong."<sup>106</sup> To deceive the enemy is a principle of warfare: how far one is justified in deceiving one's own superior officer, even with the best of intentions, is a delicate matter to decide.

There was ample reason for the passion and despair of Lanrezac. He was almost alone in the belief that the Germans would advance into Belgium, north of the Meuse, and he had, contrary to orders, moved his Fifth Army sixty miles westward in shelter of Maubeuge to meet it. He refused to cross the Sambre and attack unaided what he felt sure was the main body of the enemy. Nor was he re-

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assured of Sir John French's competence when he discovered that the English cavalry under Allenby was at the right rear of the infantry. For all these reasons Lanrezac was dismissed, for the same reasons that General Michel was dismissed from the Superior Council of War three years earlier, because they both insisted that the Germans would follow Von Schlieffen's strategy of a wide sweep through Belgium.

Sir Henry Wilson had great faith in his capacity for handling people. General Pershing would be all right if properly handled. Even of General Gourko he had hopes that he could "shake him into some practical frame of mind."<sup>107</sup> The trouble, on the other hand, was that "Haig and Robertson think they understand the French; they don't and they never will; then they don't take me into their confidence." One of "those cursed misunderstandings, due probably to my not being present," had just occurred.<sup>108</sup> And yet Sir Douglas Haig was coming to a knowledge. At a meeting in Beauquesne on July 3rd, 1916, "Joffre was quite brutal to Haig who told him he was not speaking as one gentleman to another,"<sup>109</sup> but to Foch "Haig is always civil

and nice.”<sup>110</sup> When “Nivelle wrote two letters containing orders, and in rather curt language,”<sup>111</sup> Haig made it quite clear that the formula *J’ordre* was not applicable to him. In the end Nivelle held up to his own generals Haig’s loyalty as an example for them. Sir Douglas Haig at the moment was not in the temper to be ordered. His own orders were already out for the capture of Vimy Ridge. Probably Haig’s way was the better. When so serious a business as battles is to be discussed, it is best that the principals meet face to face without an intermediary who may have designs and purposes of his own.

The liaison officer was now about to feel the serpent’s tooth; after Nivelle’s disaster, his position in France was untenable. It was Foch who told him that Pétain would not have him at general headquarters. He heard elsewhere that Painlevé was accusing him of having tried to take charge of the French Government.<sup>112</sup> “What a scurvy crowd”<sup>113</sup> he thought them; but to be quite impartial, only two weeks earlier, he thought his own “Admiralty and War Office a set of d—— fools.”<sup>114</sup>

Foch said further that he had spoken to Robertson, who surmised that “Haig would fit him out

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with a corps." But Wilson knew better. He had had a corps and it was spirited away. The end came on June 2nd: "Foch was quite clear that I ought to go and ask for a command. It is abundantly clear that I cannot stop here (at Chantilly). But when I told Foch that Haig wanted me to go to Paris, I found that he was against that also. So he does not want me—and he really is my friend." <sup>115</sup> This period of liaison lasted only three months.

Therefore in June 1917, Sir Henry Wilson found himself back in London in the ranks of the unemployed soldier, an invidious place for a soldier in time of war, who is physically capable of carrying a bayonet. "It seems a little hard," he writes, "in order to suit other people, to drop from 3000 pounds a year to six hundred." <sup>116</sup> Now appears a dangerous side of his nature. Four times on two successive pages, <sup>117</sup> he affirms his liability to make "mischief." On the morning of the 28th, he said to Sir Douglas Haig, "if no employment was found for me, I would probably get into mischief." On July 3rd, Lord Milner suggested that he might find employment in the Balkans. The comment is, "I told Milner I was more inclined to go in for mischief." The

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same afternoon, Sir William Robertson told him there was absolutely no way of employing him at home. The comment is, "I told him I should probably get into mischief." Then he "had nearly two hours with Smuts at the Savoy." This is the record, "He was very anxious to know what I was going to do, and I replied—mischief."

An unemployed soldier of high rank has marvellous skill in making a place for himself and building up a business. He will begin with a corporal-clerk. Next time the commanding officer passes that way, he will find a staff of sixteen firmly anchored to the ground. Sir Henry Wilson found his first opening in a talk with General Smuts.<sup>118</sup> "He entirely agreed with Wilson's contention that there ought to be a body composed of three soldiers, English, French, and Italian, with suitable staffs and full knowledge, who would be empowered to draw up plans of attack and defence along the whole line from Nieuport to Egypt. Smuts, moreover, declared that Wilson must be the English soldier."

Ten days later, Sir William Robertson offered him the Eastern Home Command; but he had heard in the meantime that Lloyd George and Lord

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French had hit upon a scheme under which Robertson was in future to submit his plans to a military triumvirate composed of French, Wilson, and another general. But Wilson had the larger idea of a superior inter-allied staff, and French thought it excellent. A meeting was arranged with Lloyd George. Wilson unfolded the plan which he said he had in mind for two and a half years. "It was not aimed at Robertson, Haig, or anybody." Lloyd George "was distinctly taken. It was because of his profound disgust that he had thought of forming a committee of Johnnie and me and another; but he now quite agreed that my plan was infinitely better. He ordered me to see Milner and Bonar Law. I demurred, but he said that he wished it." <sup>119</sup> Milner, Bonar Law, and Carson highly approved. By a singular chance Lord Derby telephoned for him to come to the War Office, and told him the War Committee had unanimously decided that he should go to America under Lord Northcliffe; but that was not now good enough.

In the meantime, he took over the Eastern Command. "The arrangement suited him well; the pay was a consideration; he was able to reside at his



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house in Eaton Place; being stationed in London enabled him to keep in touch with his friends in the Cabinet, his friends at the War Office, and his friends in Parliament." Foch came to see him, and he "told Foch we should never have any plan worth a d—— until we got my superior War Council. He agreed."<sup>120</sup> At a War Cabinet on October 11th, Lloyd George invoked a precedent "for calling in Johnnie and me." On the 17th, when the three dined at Johnnie's house, "it became very clear that Lloyd George meant to get Robertson out and curb the power of the Commander-in-chief in the field. This is what I have been advising for two and a half years, forming a superior direction over all."<sup>121</sup> Lord Derby was afraid the scheme would lead to the resignation of Haig, Robertson, and himself. On the 29th, "Winston is quite clear that we must have a Superior Direction." On the 31st, the War Cabinet decided to set up a Superior War Council.<sup>122</sup> All plans were to be submitted to the Military Member, and he would have power to alter the plans or make fresh ones. "Wilson was to be the Military Member, as indeed he knew already, and he was fairly well satisfied with the proposals." The tri-



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umph was complete when French apologized for not having resigned when Asquith refused to allow Wilson to be his chief of staff: "This was so sweet of him, and we shook hands without a word more." <sup>123</sup>

The Supreme War Council was constituted at Rapallo on November 7th, 1917; the first meeting was held the following day; the British members were Lloyd George, Milner, Wilson. When Wilson returned to Paris, he found that Clemenceau was not much interested, but he "pushed him about." The question of unity of command arose, and Clemenceau "said he meant that only two men should run the whole thing, himself and me." <sup>124</sup> In London he had more trouble. Lord Derby and Bonar Law refused to let him have Tit-Willow and the Lord, "so I got cross, and said, 'Very well then, Lloyd George can't have me.'" He had previously arranged with Lloyd George that he should send his reports to him and not to any one else, and that he should get what officers he wanted. That being settled, he went to Bonar Law, and said he would refuse to move in the matter of the officers, "for that, if I did, I would be turning myself into a politi-

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cian.”<sup>125</sup> It was conduct such as this that convinced Lord Milner that Wilson was “too clever.”

Upon the first contact with the French the real meaning of the Council disclosed itself. Wilson was content that he should control Haig and Robertson; that the French member should control Foch; and he depended on his own cleverness to control the French member. He would therefore have supreme direction of the War, and Versailles would be “Monsieur Wilson.”<sup>126</sup> But Clemenceau had the contrary design, that Foch and Pétain were to be of the Council; and they trusted to themselves to be supreme. He wanted in addition to have one Commander-in-chief from the North Sea to the Adriatic; all the others might be English. Lloyd George refused. In the end Weygand was appointed, and he was Foch in disguise. The scheme broke down at the first touch of reality, which concerned the extent of line to be taken over by the British. With much formality the question was submitted to Versailles, and it was decided how much of the line was to be taken over. The French members agreed with alacrity.

But this Supreme War Council at Versailles had

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forgotten the existence of Sir Douglas Haig. He refused to accept further responsibility at the risk of disaster, as he had already taken over several miles of front from the French on either side of the Oise. The reasons for Haig's refusal are admirably stated by the editor of the diary.<sup>127</sup> "A considerable portion of the front taken over was in the valley of the Oise, which was very marshy: the French had not taken the fortification of such ground very seriously. But, as it happened, February and March, 1918, turned out to be particularly dry months; that terrain, which the French had looked upon as virtually impassable, had changed its character, a fact of which the enemy took full advantage when the blow at Gough's Army was delivered on March 21st."

The only other matter of importance that ever came before the Supreme War Council was Wilson's scheme for a Central Reserve. The first mention of the scheme was in a "long talk with Robertson" on January 10th, 1918,<sup>128</sup> to whom he made the "proposal for keeping a certain number of divisions away from Haig and Pétain, and which those men could only draw on with the permission of Ver-

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sailles, or of Robertson and Foch." Next day, he presented the proposal to Clemenceau, "which, he said, meant 'under Wilson'—to which I agreed."

Then he wrote to Lord Milner. On the 17th he again "seized the opportunity to press the proposal" on Clemenceau, but this time eliminated Foch and Robertson. The Tiger "appeared to be ready to agree."<sup>129</sup> On the 23rd, "Foch is quite of my mind, and Clemenceau will nominate him to dispose of its use." On the 28th, he told Robertson "the Reserve must be under one authority." On the 30th, he "advised Lloyd George to re-establish at once the power and prestige of Versailles."<sup>130</sup> On February 1st, there was "a great fight" over the Reserve; "Robertson fought"; Wilson "wrote notes for Lloyd George." Next day the Reserve was "adopted unanimously, and so the long duel between me and Robertson has ended in his complete defeat. Robertson fought to the last, but was badly beaten. Robertson was overruled about the 1918 campaign, and squarely beaten over the question of the General Reserve. This really was a triumph." Then comes the sinister question—"I wonder will he resign?"<sup>131</sup>

It was not really such a triumph after all. The

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Supreme War Council again forgot the existence of Sir Douglas Haig. He said in effect that he had no objection to a General Reserve. Versailles was free to create such a body if they could find the material. He was equally definite that they would get no troops from him. He would keep his own reserves. He said quite plainly to Clemenceau that he would not hand over any of his divisions to the General Reserve. He would resign first, which Clemenceau "thinks would be a disaster" at this juncture. Then, in addition, "the Tiger finds Pétain in the same mood. He favours the General Reserve being composed only of troops withdrawn from Italy, and then perhaps let it grow later. I confess I don't agree, and said so bluntly, but I am not in a position to overcome the Tiger, Pétain, and Haig."<sup>132</sup> And this is the only confession of modesty in the whole diary, except, "I want to hide," when he was promoted Field-Marshal.<sup>133</sup>

And yet Sir Henry Wilson did not abandon hope. He carried the case to London. On March 4th, Lloyd George, although of opinion that Haig was mistaken, agreed that Haig could not be compelled to hand over the divisions. Haig had written his

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official refusal. Rawlinson supported him. Wilson saw Haig: "I was quite unable to persuade him." As between Haig and the Reserve he was compelled sorely against his will to choose Haig. The American General Bliss gives a touch of the comic by "rather wanting to make him believe" that he had got the Reserve, but Wilson was able to persuade him it was not so.<sup>134</sup> Still he persisted. He saw Foch and Weygand: "Foch wants me to order Douglas Haig; but as I told him, the question is greatly complicated by the fact that Clemenceau and Pétain agree with Haig. He made no answer."<sup>135</sup>

One would think the question was decided, but it was not. Next day there was a meeting of the Supreme War Council at Downing Street: "Two hours' talk about General Reserve, and no decision"; in the afternoon a resolution drafted by Wilson, Hankey, and Lloyd George, and adopted: "Of course in a sense this is nonsense, as it does not give us any General Reserve, but it does keep the main idea alive, and saves the position of the Executive Board."<sup>136</sup> Yet again, on the following day, "a long and private talk with Foch, I confess his case is sound, but I advised his not saying too much." And



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finally, March 17th: "I had a talk with the Tiger and told him the real difficulty was that Foch and I were right, whilst he, Haig, and Pétain were wrong; and yet Foch and I had to give way, Foch with a bad grace and I with a good one. The Tiger agreed absolutely." <sup>137</sup>

This Versailles device, the creation of Sir Henry Wilson, and Lloyd George's by adoption, was bound to fail when Sir Douglas Haig and Sir William Robertson put it to the test. At the least it was hortatory: at the most advisory. It had no authority over as much as an army mule. A lance-corporal could defy its most solemn decree. The British Army and the British Constitution would protect him in his defiance. And Sir Henry Wilson was clever enough to discover the defect. Authority lay in London, and Lloyd George in chagrin over the fiasco resolved to give that authority to Wilson and send Robertson to Versailles. Wilson preferred to remain at Versailles, provided Lloyd George gave him "more power at Versailles and reduce Robertson from the position of a master to that of a servant." <sup>138</sup> Robertson refused to abdicate the authority of his office in London or go to Versailles where



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he would have no authority at all. He was dismissed. Wilson was appointed in his place. Haig was too powerful to be moved. Wilson now having changed his point of view discovered the advantage there would be in sending to Versailles a junior officer who would stand to him in the relation of Weygand to Foch. He would then exercise from London the power that failed him in France.

At this point the diary becomes trivial and complicated. The English Channel is the river of the fable, and Wilson the farmer who was faced with the problem of ferrying across a fox, and a goose, and a bag of corn, in a boat so small that it would only carry himself and one of those items at the same time. If he carried the corn, the fox would eat the goose; if he carried the fox, the goose would eat the corn. But with the astuteness of the farmer, Wilson solved the problem. Robertson refused either to remain in London or go to Versailles; he departed for the Eastern Command. Wilson came to London. Rawlinson went to Versailles, but did not stay long, and Tit-Willow took his place. Versailles was of no further interest. His first business in his new position as chief of the Imperial General-

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staff was to call upon Sir Douglas Haig, and he fortified himself by calling upon Lloyd George as he went. To his immense relief, Haig said what he might have been expected to say, "All these quarrels had nothing to do with him, and that he was prepared to accept whatever was decided by the Cabinet." <sup>139</sup>

It will be observed that this farce was concluded on March 17th, 1918, only four days before Sir Douglas Haig was beginning to employ a part of those very reserves he had refused to surrender, in his desperate and successful struggle to meet the supreme and final onslaught of the enemy that was to last throughout the summer. Sir Douglas Haig had no faith in the war-games that were being played at Versailles. They might be right; they might be wrong; in any case, they were merely games. Every one knew the blow was about to fall; no one but the Germans knew where it would fall; 700,000 new troops were required to make the whole line safe; only 300,000 were available. He kept the line as strong as he could. He was probably not a student of the Father of History, but by instinct he understood his great saying, "For war, least of

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all things, conforms to prescribed rules; it strikes out a path for itself when the moment comes; and therefore he who has his temper under control in warfare is safer far, but he who gets into a passion is, through his own fault, liable to the greater fall."

Haig did not get into a passion; he allowed the enemy to expend their force upon the Fifth Army. When that force was nearly spent, he brought up his immediate Reserve and called for such help as he was entitled to demand from the French, whereby he controlled the enemy movement, and kept his own strategy unimpaired for the summer and for the victory that came in the autumn. After all, a general cannot be entirely wrong in his plans if those plans lead to success. But the conduct of the Versailles Council, farcical as it was, brought a revelation to him. In that light he accepted Marshal Foch as a virtual Generalissimo, so that the French generals might be brought into accord and his own original strategy should not be destroyed. Pétain was preoccupied with the immediate safety of Paris: in the mind of Haig and Foch alike the master idea was the Continuity of the Line. Lord Milner leaves it on record that Sir Douglas in that moment of

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self-abnegation unparalleled in military history declared, "I can deal with a man, not with a committee." <sup>140</sup>

It is of little present importance to the British, who won the last war, so long as it was not the Germans. The Americans and the French may settle the dispute between themselves, although they should take into account that it was no alien hand controlled the British Navy. But it is important to the British, who shall win the next war, when the alignment of forces may be different. The legend which arose from excessive generosity, may if unchecked create in one or other of our present allies a false sense of superiority that will be fatal to them in the end, and in the meantime cause a lessened moral in the Empire. To avert this dual danger, certain allegations about the events that occurred in the summer of 1918 may be put forward, after the manner of an advocate who desires justice; yet well aware that the opposing advocate must be heard before judgment is delivered.

Haig's refusal to surrender his reserves was justified by the events following the German attack of March 21st. It was dawn on the 23rd, before a

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French division came to his relief, and night before a second arrived. By evening of the 24th, four additional divisions were in line, although two of them had no guns; and none had food supply or more than the ammunition they carried. At no time up to the 28th, when the crisis was over, did the French have more than six divisions in action, and none seriously committed.

On the night of the 24th, Pétain at a conference in Dury announced to Haig, that the orders of his Government were, not to reinforce him but to fall back from Montdidier upon Beauvais to cover Paris. French anxiety for Paris was quite as natural as English anxiety for the Channel Ports, but the safety of either and of both depended upon the continuity of the line. In this conviction, two soldiers and three civilians stood first,—Haig, Foch, Clemenceau, Milner, and Churchill: "*Ni l'un ni l'autre; cramponnez partout*,—We shall give up neither the one nor the other; we shall clamp the whole front with bars of steel."

It was in that desperate moment Haig appealed to his own Government; and on the 26th, the Conference at Doullens was held. He had already asked

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that Marshal Foch, whose mind was as his own, be created Generalissimo, although Wilson's strange choice was Clemenceau [Life of Rawlinson, Maurice, p. 213]. This was agreed for the area *autour d'Amiens*, but Haig insisted, in face of strong French opposition, that the authority of Foch should extend to include *tout le front*, from the Alps to the sea. The continuity of the line was now assured. Marshal Foch, however, was not hopeful "materially"; he did not think victory was possible that year. All depended upon what would happen "before winter sets in." In August the answer from the official oracle was, "About next autumn, in twelve months." Even in October, *sa famille militaire* prophesied, "In the Spring."

The new appointment brought little relief to the British. The Germans on April 9th, began their final assault for the Channel Ports. Haig appealed to Foch for aid. No aid was even promised. On the 10th, 11th, and 14th, he made successive appeals; on the 15th he was compelled to record his opinion, "that the arrangements made by the Generalissimo were insufficient to meet the military situation." It was only on the 18th, that he "slowly



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and reluctantly," as Mr. Churchill describes,<sup>141</sup> consented to part with any reserves, but before they came into line, the battle of the Lys was won by British effort alone.

Yet, the appointment of Foch was justified. He stood in the background. Both sides were fully committed to battle; he had no staff that could direct or interfere; but he and Haig were in complete personal agreement. On July 15th, the Germans were across the Marne once more. Foch asked Haig for four additional British divisions. The English Cabinet feared the sacrifice would be in vain and the northern front impaired. They sent General Smuts to Haig, offering him official support, "if he was being unduly pressed." He replied that he would take the risk. He even gave to Smuts a written message, that he "fully realized that if the dispositions of Foch proved to be wrong, the blame will rest on me. On the other hand, if they prove right the credit will be with Foch. With this," he added, with a dainty stroke of irony, "the Government should be well satisfied."

Foch yielded to Haig's superior experience in the three critical operations of the Campaign. Haig on



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August 8th, fought the battle of Amiens on his own design and against the secret distrust of his own Government, with all troops, French and British, under his command. He refused to follow Foch's "directive" of the 10th, reiterated on the 14th, to advance across the Somme in a frontal attack. A conference was held. He still refused although "observing a most friendly tone." General Rawlinson who commanded the Fourth Army thinks the King in person was going to persuade Foch to abandon the attempt. "On the afternoon of the 14th, Sir Douglas Haig succeeded in inducing Foch to give up the idea, and got him to agree to extending the battle northwards with Byng's Third Army."<sup>142</sup> On the 21st, Haig opened the battle of Bapaume which lasted for ten days, and forced the enemy back upon the Hindenburg Line with a loss of 53,000 prisoners. These were the operations which Foch assured Haig "would serve as a model for all time."

To break that line was Haig's next task. Maubeuge was his objective. If he attained that, the entire enemy front would dissolve. But for success, the whole allied effort must be directed upon that

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single point. Marshal Foch and General Pershing had already arranged for an advance from St. Mihiel eastward upon Metz and further into the Saar Valley. Haig plead that the advance be changed to the westward, from a divergent to a convergent direction upon Mezières. The result was an immense converging movement toward Mezières by the French and Americans; towards Maubeuge by Haig; towards Ghent by British, Belgians, and French. By the end of October the War was won.

Three separate minds acting independently converged upon Foch. These were Clemenceau, Milner, and Haig. When they met at Doullens, they were astonished to find themselves in unison. Foch was accepted by Lloyd George not, as he said, because one general was better than another but because one general was better than two; and having accepted him, it was natural that he and his followers should magnify him at the expense of Haig to justify the choice. This excessive praise and the natural assumption of superiority on the part of the French caused friction between the two armies, which waxed or waned according as one or the other was in victory or defeat.

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Marshal Foch came to be looked upon as a portent, like one of those heavenly portents that occurred about the time,—Mars in opposition on March 15th, Jupiter in conjunction on the 17th; the sun in the vernal equinox on the 21st, now in the ascendant and marching to the culmination of the summer solstice, when the Germans finally lost their place in the sun. Nothing could be further from the fact. Victory was won not by magic but by sheer fighting. In the first forty days the British lost 288,066 men, and in the whole campaign 830,000; in the last four months, the French suffered 531,000 casualties; but there were yet half a million Americans in France to draw upon. The obedience of Foch to the masterful Haig, the loyalty of Haig to the generous Foch, in face of the indomitable Ludendorff,—such perfection stands alone in the history of war. The fame of Foch rests upon his faith that British troops are incapable of permanent defeat, upon American assistance, and the determination of the French to triumph once for all. His strategy succeeded because Sir Douglas Haig by persuasion prevented him from putting it into effect.

A diary is of interest only when it discloses an

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interesting mind. As a record of external events it has the same value as a newspaper. One does not read Pepys for naval purposes, Montaigne for history, Amiel for an account of Geneva. One reads Amiel with delight because he had the habit *de converser avec lui-même la plume à la main*. His Journal was to him *le confident de ses méditations intimes, l'asile où le penseur perçoit conscience de sa vie intérieure, interrogeait sa destinée, cherchait l'apaisement dans l'examen et la confession*.

Sir Henry Wilson does none of these things. There is nothing profound in the diary. To one familiar with the war and with the literature of the war during the past ten years there is no military enlightenment. There is little more than political talk: it is mainly the talk of Sir Henry Wilson, not enough of what was said in reply, and not enough certainty that the replies are correctly reported. A man who talked and wrote so much could have little time for the serious business of war. On one of the most critical days the entries in the diary amount to 1300 words, but that is not, as the editor affirms, a proof of their historical importance. Nor was there much of military importance in the diary

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on the day it was written. Too many entries begin, "The newspapers say," "I see in the papers"; and others contain absurd gossip captured from the army air, which was usually false and often malicious. The diary is rich in surmise, prophecy, strategical and tactical suggestion, advice, and judgment upon the correct procedure for meeting hypothetical situations. But even if these entries had been transmitted to Sir Douglas Haig on the day they were written, it is doubtful if he would have found much assistance from them, for he had the *Times* newspaper every afternoon and Mr. J. L. Garvin's writings once a week.

The supreme "revelation," the final value even to one who has read the literature most assiduously, is this: that the Cabinet created twice a position, extra to establishment, unauthorized by Statute, unrecognized by Regulations; and placed in it an officer who had been carried on the strength as Major-General and afterwards as commander of an English area, from which he was enabled to threaten the Commander-in-chief in France, engage in a "duel," and "defeat," and "triumph" over the Chief of the Imperial General-staff.<sup>143</sup> Had this book been



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in the hands of the soldiers during the War, it might well have caused despondency and despair.

Thucydides himself was in the habit of putting speeches in the mouth of his generals, but they were always in the character of the speaker. The sayings Sir Henry Wilson puts into the mouth of his interlocutors are always in the character of Sir Henry Wilson himself. And one who has knowledge of certain events current in those days is compelled to ask himself if the whole diary is not as fabulous as the entries concerning those of which he has knowledge. "Bonar Law asked me if I would take command of the Canadian Corps. He will get Aitken to come and dine to-night, and I will hear what he has to say; but Aitken was not able to come, so I heard no more of the Canadian Corps." <sup>144</sup> The editor himself seems to have a similar suspicion in his own mind when he employs as if in detachment the words, "according to Wilson's own account." <sup>145</sup>

He had a hidden mind. But the shell does at times break to disclose what lay within. It breaks in March 1917, when he "went to Haig's and told him that in point of fact I probably could put him out if I wished." <sup>146</sup> It breaks in his interview with Haig on

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March 25th, 1918, at the moment when that soldier was barely holding the Germans: "I could not help reminding him that it was he who killed my plan for a General Reserve. An impossible situation, for here is the attack I foresaw and predicted in full blast, and really no arrangements to meet it." And yet Haig did meet it. It breaks again on May 11th, 1918: "I advised Haig being brought home. But Lloyd George and Milner would not decide"; and again on May 20th: "I told him that I had suggested to Lloyd George that he should bring him home to succeed Johnnie. He was nice as could be. He did not say anything." <sup>147</sup> But Sir Henry Wilson made one supreme error, and the fault was Lord Milner's. Lord Milner had returned from France and the same day informed him that, "he thinks Haig ridiculously optimistic." Sir Henry believed him although the date was September 23rd, 1918. That was the moment for dismissing Haig, and taking his place. Within forty days the war was over. Sir Henry Wilson would then have achieved the last things.

In reading the diary, one is continually amazed at the discrepancy between the secret written word



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about his friends and the spoken words as they stood face to face. At the time when he was enjoying the most complete confidence of Lloyd George, when, according to his own account, the Prime Minister was saying of him, "the whole future of the war rests on your shoulders"; <sup>148</sup> when he was meeting with Haig and Robertson on terms of confidential intimacy, he was in his written diary ascribing to Lloyd George a malicious plot for getting rid of both of them, at the cost of spoiling the Italian offensive, and convicting them of "gross miscalculation and incapacity," whereby they "entirely failed to do anything serious except lose a lot of men." <sup>149</sup> Even his faithful friend and protector, Sir John French, is the continual subject of secret contempt; but those who yet bear any ill-will to Sir Henry Wilson may gratify their malice by elaborating the antithesis for themselves.

"He seems a very comic fellow," was the comment of a staff-officer at the Dover musketry ranges in his subaltern days. One of his comrades, Fyers by name, writes: "A staff-officer drew me aside to ask, 'Who is that officer standing over there?' 'That is Mr. Wilson.' The staff-officer gazed at him, and

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then turned away with the remark, 'He seems a very comic fellow.' " The narrator adds the significant sentence, "Henry gloated over it when I told him, and he used to refer to the incident years afterwards."<sup>150</sup> It was enough that a staff-officer had noticed him. He demanded pre-eminence at all hazard; at any cost he must be unique. A telegraph boy came up to him in the barrack square, and handed him a telegram. It was addressed to "the ugliest officer in the Army," a form of jesting common to subalterns. He praised the boy for his perspicacity, content with being recognized as unique; and long years afterwards he told the story with glee in Flanders.<sup>151</sup> In his numerous crossings of the Channel, he would take his place on the bridge, which is the highest station on the ship, where he could say to the world, *M'as tu vu?*

All observers agree that he was a fine figure of a man. Sir William Orpen looked upon him with the sure eye of the artist in the year 1878 on the platform of the little railway station in Blackrock: "Such a perfect figure, such perfect clothes, spats to wonder at, boots to dream of; with a rain-coat thrown over one shoulder, yellow-gloved hands

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clasped behind. Him we called 'Rake-faced Wilson': his brother, 'Droop-eyed Wilson.' Yes; it was as if the Assyrian princes mentioned in Ezekiel had arrived amongst us." <sup>152</sup> Even after thirty-eight years this figure was unimpaired. Major Lewin saw him at Lillers in February 1916, on the lecture platform, and heard his personal evidence: "The general view of all young officers is that Corps commanders are fat, old, pot-bellied blighters who live far back in safety in 'chattoos,' eat and drink a good deal. This being the case, I felt that if any of you were kind enough to come here this evening, you would at least realize that I am not." <sup>153</sup>

The book is punctuated with "laughter": and yet the average reader will be distressed in the attempt to discover what people were laughing at. Sir William Orpen, who was not a dull man, had a similar experience: "His laugh ever made one laugh, though no one had any idea what he was laughing at." <sup>154</sup> One day in December 1912, he was walking in Kensington Gardens with another Irishman who has this vivid recollection, "I could see out of the tail of my eye the passers-by turn and stare as they heard such expressions as, 'You should have seen

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old Balfour's face,' and 'I tell you I had Bonar Law in fits,' interspersed with guffaws of the heartiest enjoyment."

"Nothing," says Goethe, "is more significant of men's character than what they find laughable." For character another would substitute culture, since the last thing in which the cultivated man can have community with the vulgar is their jocularity. Lord Balfour is a cultivated man who by all accounts and from his appearance does not laugh easily or indulge in gestures of familiarity. And yet it is recorded in the diary <sup>155</sup>, that Mr. Balfour exploded with laughter, and clapped him on the back. But the words that excited this explosion are recorded in full, and they do not seem to have warranted so violent an explosion.

The laughter he excited in boys and in subordinate officers is easier to understand. The sense of humour like the sense of taste in food and wine develops late. One cannot infer from the laughter of boys and young officers the wit or humour of the thing that excites them. The earliest lesson a subaltern learns is to laugh in the right place; not to laugh or, worse still, to laugh in the wrong place is

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an end to his career. University students have made the same discovery in respect of their professors, and Sir Henry Wilson when he was Commandant of the Staff College at Camberley was at once professor and commanding officer too.

He was asked by the Commandant of the Royal Military College to give a lecture. "I was quietly working in my room at the War Office," he began, "when suddenly the door burst open and in walked your Commandant. The best people always knock." The editor of the diary is careful to add, that the young gentlemen "made such a row of laughing that the remainder of the sentence could not be heard." Further examples of his wit are too precious to be lost: "There is no reason why you should not sleep provided you do not fall off your seats and make a squishy noise on the floor; snoring is strictly prohibited." "Needless to say," the narrator concludes, "he got the boys thoroughly on his side."<sup>156</sup>

Again, when he commanded the IV Corps, "his renown as a lecturer speedily spread through the corps and beyond it, and he was frequently brought to oblige other divisions." The hall "was packed with a swarm of officers." It was easy in those days

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for an officer commanding a corps to secure an audience. "His appearance on the platform evoked a burst of applause, and there followed a tense expectant silence. Then suddenly, as though it were by some prearranged signal, a cock crowed. 'That's a damned fine cock.' There was the usual 'burst of laughter.' " <sup>157</sup> His own excessive laughter irritated Lord Northcliffe. There was always something behind his permanent smile and professional laugh. It would be "great fun" if he were made honorary colonel of a Cossack regiment, for which two of his friends "were plotting with Boris who commands all the Cossacks." <sup>158</sup>

Of humour, wit, irony, there is not a trace, save in two sentences; and in those the only humour is that he failed to see the humour in them. "Lloyd George is seedy or meditating a speech"—that is the only amusing sentence in the book. When Sir Robert Borden proposed to hand over the captured German colonies to the United States, the delicacy of that jest was too subtle for him. By this lack of humour, he mistook Lord Milner's irony for praise—"Too clever, too pro-French, summed up people too quickly." <sup>159</sup> He mistook, too, the implication



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in the term "boyishness" so commonly applied to him. This boyish "summing up" amounted to nothing more than "calling names," and scribbling them in the secret places of his diary: President Wilson—ass; Lloyd George, Asquith, Grey, Kitchener, Briand, Galliéni—fools; the Cabinet—idiots, a miserable crowd; peace delegates—madmen: statesmen—Frocks, timid, ignorant, blustering, useless, beneath contempt; public policies—criminal folly; difficult negotiations—complete chaos; medical management of a foreign influx of typhus patients—terrible, criminal, appalling; recruiting—scandalous, monstrous.

This bestowal of nicknames is, of course, a habit of the army, and a nickname is the cachet of the professional soldier. Lucky Haig, Wully Robertson, Plumer, Horne had theirs. These nicknames bespot the diary, a primitive remnant of schoolboy days in minds that remain childish until the end; and yet at times they are significant and descriptive: Tit-Willow, Johnnie, Goughie, the Bull, the Lord, Conky, the Tiger. His own familiar name was Long Job Wilson, bestowed upon him with amazing perspicacity by Lord Roberts' daughters,<sup>160</sup> and



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perpetuated by his grandson as Ze Long Job.<sup>161</sup> The French called him *Double Vé*.

By this lack of humour also he failed to understand the distinction between the ridiculous and the amusing. When he was a student at the Staff College, he had a wagon but no horse. He put himself between the shafts, his wife in the wagon, and a servant to push behind. They arrived at the dinner. After dinner, as the guests were preparing to depart, the butler announced, "Mr. Wilson's carriage—but there's no 'orse."<sup>162</sup> These English are well trained; it takes keener than an Irish eye to see below their surface. As his own servant said, "them English is a clever people." Such exhibitions are frequent throughout the book. In a queer rig that he wore in the Park for a morning run, he was mistaken for a tramp news-vendor, and it amused him. The situation in which a man is taken for a fool is humorous just according to the extent to which he is or is not one.

He was fond of dressing up. At the Staff College he wore a chequered plaid so remarkable it was known as the Wilson tartan. On January 3th, 1917, he was to be seen at a gala dinner in the Russian

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Foreign Office: "I wore the Grand Officer of the Legion of Honour and the Star and Necklace of the Bath, and my medals; also Russian shoulder straps, and grey Astrakan cap, and altogether I was a fine figure of a man! I created quite a sensation. I was much taller than the Grand Duke Serge, and altogether a 'notable,' as I was told. Superb." That was his own final judgment.<sup>163</sup>

This love of the spectacular, the dramatic, the theatrical, combined with his personal courage, nearly cost him an eye in Burma; in the end it cost him his life. In March 1887, he was in command of a small detachment of riflemen near Mambu in pursuit of dacoits. Two of them were "cornered; he made his men stand back; unarmed but for a bamboo walking-stick, he advanced to take the pair himself, when one of them suddenly slashed at his head with a previously concealed dah," a weapon native to those parts. He was struck over the eye. It appears that "several small bones behind the eye had been chipped or broken." The anatomy is vague; his name does not appear in the list of casualties, but with due formality he was invalided to England. The omission is corrected in *The Quar-*

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*terly Army List* of January, 1916, where he appears as "wounded." This same stick was broken by a bullet at Colenso, and he had it mended by a silver band; he is shown holding it in the picture which is reproduced as frontispiece to the volumes. This was the stick he always carried when in uniform.<sup>164</sup>

The supreme example that is offered of his optimistic, encouraging, tonic, inimitable assurance, cheerfulness and moral courage—these are the words—is his conduct at headquarters in the Retreat from Mons. Late at night, "in a long dark room, Murray who for the last five days had been severely taxed night and day with a crushing weight of anxiety and practically no sleep suddenly dropped forward in a dead faint." Whilst Sir Archibald Murray was being carried away, Wilson is observed again "with a comical whimsical expression on his face, clapping his hands softly together to keep time, as he chanted in a low tone, 'We shall never get there, we shall never get there.' 'Where, Henri?' And he chanted on, 'To the sea, to the sea, to the sea.' "<sup>165</sup>

Of a somewhat similar performance staged in the War Office after Neuve Chapelle by him and the actual editor of the diary, the editor offers the opin-

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ion, "Had a War Office messenger come in, we should have been set down as crazy." He himself has said it. Had a soldier from that retreat or from that battle seen these performances, they would not "wring a smile" from him; he would stiffen to attention; his lip would curl; he would show his teeth; but he would be less tolerant than the War Office messenger.<sup>166</sup> A clown at a circus will do very well: there is no place for a comedian at a funeral—and the war was one vast and continuous funeral.

His eulogist offers as an excuse and reason for every eccentricity, that he was "a typical Irishman." The typical Irishman is not easy to establish; and to none is the stage Irishman with his long-tailed green coat adorned with brass buttons, and his truculent challenge "to tread on the tail of my coat," more offensive than to the Irish themselves. Sir Henry had this figure in mind on October 17th, 1921, when "the Army Council gave Pershing a dinner. The Duke of Connaught was there, but not Lloyd George or other Frocks except—" At this point the editor fails us again. The person is described as a Cabinet Minister and designated X. "I had a row with X. I trailed my coat, by saying

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that I was looking out for a yacht in which to escape from England or Ireland and sail for Ulster when Collins had taken over the United Kingdom." The Cabinet Minister made a remark which Sir Henry did not like. "To this I replied, 'That is a lie, and you know it is a lie.' " <sup>167</sup> Such conduct is not that of a typical Irishman.

Posthumous books are dangerous. His friend, Lord Rawlinson, has chosen the better way. Since his "death," a dictated "Revelation" from him, in 107 pages, has been issued by high authority, through Dunstan and Company, which may be procured for three shillings. One looks in vain for new light upon the earthly events in which he had so large a share; and his style of writing has not improved as much as one might expect. It is a matter of just surmise, what kind of book Wilson would have made, had he lived to edit and publish his diaries.

### III

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HIDDEN in the book, although so difficult to discover, is the secret of Sir Henry Wilson's advancement to power. When all members of a species are of the same quality, the slightest accidental variation in any one will send it upward on its biological career. By a succession of French governesses Wilson learned to speak French. That was his variation from his fellow-officers. He had a natural affinity with the French; they were alert and bright in thought; he loved talk; <sup>188</sup> he had an affection for them because they were not English. Those who regard history *sub specie æternitatis* affect to find in the trivial incident of Arletta's pretty feet twinkling in the brook of Fæsulæ the origin of the Norman Conquest. Such esoterists by the same principle might equally discover that the English point of entrance into the European war was the French gov-



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erness who taught Henry Wilson French. But history is not so simple as that.

He had loquacity; skill in presenting an argument either in speech or in writing; a countenance so open and a manner so boisterous, they must be witness to an ingenuous mind and a heart that was sincere. These qualities appealed to the English because they were strange. He impressed the English by what he appeared to be, and the Scotch and Welsh who governed England by what he really was. He imposed upon the powerful intelligence of Mr. Churchill, and for a time deflected the subtle instinct of Mr. Lloyd George. A man is judged by his admirations; but it is only fair to Mr. Churchill to assume that he had not these diaries before him when he was writing his famous book. By two things the English are impressed—the practical and the picturesque. These two qualities when combined are irresistible. Wilson had both. To speculation he added a practical knowledge acquired by physical experience which is dear to the English mind. He had made 17 trips along the German frontiers on a bicycle.<sup>169</sup> But the knowledge obtained by that means was too slight for the strategist and not pre-

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cise enough for a billeting officer. Besides, the War was not fought in that area.

In addition, he had a native capacity for intrigue, for ingratiating himself, for insinuating himself into high places, a suppleness, as one said, a cleverness, as Lord Milner put it. He had a political mind, and a firm foothold in Ulster, where he was "our General Wilson." The Ulster men formed one coherent body, and they stood resolutely behind this staff-official of their own breed. They were powerful in Parliament, and went so far as to offer him the post of Chief of the Imperial General-staff; <sup>170</sup> but he quite properly put away the crown; he had higher intentions than they surmised.

To all this as a source of power must be added his exquisite skill in the strategy of a press campaign. He had a winsome way with the journalists, and was in continuous communication with them. Of only two does he speak ill, Lord Northcliffe and Horatio Bottomley. At a meeting in Downing Street, Mr. Bottomley "talked much vain nonsense." <sup>171</sup> Lord Northcliffe was not much better. He "could not get him to talk sense. He would not consider my offensive of two Sommes. Haig and

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Robertson were perfect.”<sup>172</sup> Many persons thought one Somme was enough, although they hardly agreed with Sir Henry when he writes, “The Verdun success shows what I have been preaching for two months, that an attack anywhere except on the Somme would be instantly successful.”

The strange thing is that “he went to the *Times* office by arrangement to see Lord Northcliffe” upon so highly technical a business. But he never lost his faith in the omniscience of the Press, even after an important editor had come to him to tell “of a War Council which has been formed of Asquith, Kitchener, Haldane, Crewe, Grey, and Balfour, and these beauties are contemplating withdrawal of the Expeditionary Force from France and sending us to Austria.”<sup>173</sup> His comment, “Were ever such demented fools,” was often based on similarly false reports.

All created things fall into categories according to their kind. A species when true to itself, however humble, is admirable. A creature with the characteristics of separate species is abhorrent; it has the worst features of both. The dog, the ape, the man, the politician, the soldier are as God made them.

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Sir Henry Wilson was politician and soldier at the same time. But he did not understand that a politician like Asquith, Lloyd George, Milner, Grey, has long views and far aims, that they are in reality like the captain of a ship who alters his course to avoid perils hidden from the casual observer, so that he may bring his ship into the desired haven. The politician in Sir Henry Wilson in time became open and predominant and landed him in the House of Commons. But he was always of the opposition, and that is the stigma upon the politician who has failed. As late as December 6th, 1920, he writes, "There is not a single thing Lloyd George and his wretched Cabinet do with which I agree." <sup>174</sup>

Twenty-five years before, he thought "the Government had botched the Egyptian business." On his return from South Africa, his permanent political discontent began. After a year's experience, he found the War Office exceedingly unsatisfactory; the whole idea of governing the army by a civilian was vicious in theory and hopeless in practice; <sup>175</sup> and he found it impossible to do good work with such fools as the Financial Secretary. <sup>176</sup> The Committee set up by Mr. Arnold Forster, the Secretary

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of State for War, composed of Lord Esher, Sir J. Fisher, Sir G. Clarke, for reorganizing the War Office, behaved like madmen: their changes were scandalous; they led to chaos, and for the clerical staff made nightmares of their days. His mind never penetrated below the "gossip" of the day. His political and military perceptions were governed by his personal likes and dislikes. Even his choice of colleagues and public loyalty were determined by his own private hatreds. Sir John French, his most faithful friend, reproached him for this failing.<sup>177</sup> His deepest hatred was towards southern Ireland, and it extended to all who refused to share that hatred with him, to the members of the Government and to the English people as a whole. The English are without hatred. For that reason he bewailed, "the English are never serious about anything."

Right or wrong, Mr. Asquith considered Wilson's conduct in the Curragh mutiny to be "dangerous" to civil government. He thought it improper for the Director of Military Operations to act on the dogma, that "all government depends on the bayonets of the soldiers." Lord Kitchener was of the

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same opinion as Mr. Asquith. "A man I do not trust,"—that is a heavy indictment by the Prime Minister, written at the time and published ten years after. It was no secret from Wilson. He makes mention of his knowledge. Sir John French "said the Government and Kitchener were very hostile to me. They said my appointment would be very repugnant to the Cabinet and would shake confidence in the army; that I was the principal cause of all the Ulster trouble and was therefore dangerous." <sup>178</sup> The place for a staff-officer in time of war, repugnant to the Cabinet and considered "dangerous" by the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for War, is in obscurity.

Instead, he was allowed to go to France to instil his dangerous ideas of Mr. Asquith into the mind of Clemenceau as he afterwards instilled the same ideas of Lloyd George into the mind of Foch. As a result, Clemenceau "fully realizes about Asquith and the terrible danger we run from keeping him as Prime Minister." <sup>179</sup> To Joffre, who declared to him that he could not understand our difficulty about men and munitions, Wilson was equally free, "I told him that the answer to all his questions was



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Asquith. He told me he had written a strong letter on all these points to Briand." What Wilson conveyed to the French is quite clear from his diary of those days, "Asquith will lose the war if he possibly can, no foreign policy, no going to war, no intention to go to war."<sup>180</sup> And yet this was in April 1916, when there were many other persons in France who had been in the trenches for eighteen months in conditions that seemed to them very like war.

But Wilson was consoling himself in the belief that the "Government would soon be out, and then it would be all right."<sup>181</sup> Asquith did go out; but it was not "all right." Lloyd George in the end was no better; it would appear from the diary that he was much worse. "Asquith is out; Hurrah. I telephoned to"—various persons. "If we manage things properly, we have Asquith dead." But his enthusiasm cooled somewhat when he discovered that not Bonar Law but Lloyd George was to be Prime Minister. This was on December 5th, 1916. He had been relieved of his corps in France four days earlier. That is the date given in the diary, although the *Army List* makes it Jan. 17th, 1917. He was now unemployed. This curious practice the English

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have of appealing to the people, as an alternative to a Coalition, served him well. There was no election, and the Coalition put his friend Lloyd George in power. When Wilson transformed himself into an enemy of Lloyd George, "this cursed general election" was a different affair.<sup>182</sup>

At the beginning of the War and at the end Sir Henry Wilson was the official military adviser of the British Government. At the same time, and especially in the earlier period, he was the secret adviser of the Opposition. During both periods he was doing his political best to destroy the Governments he served. From the first, he was equally hopeless of the Empire and of the various Imperial Conferences that were to set it right. Asquith was to him incapable of taking a strong straight line; he thought the Empire would go before long. Canada was already gone in 1911, that is, if Sir Wilfrid Laurier really represented Canadian opinion. What a crowd, what beauties! was his comment on the Dominion Premiers who assembled at the Imperial Conference in 1921; but in that year the Empire was doomed; in one week, it was going, going, gone. It finally disappeared on the day the agreement with

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Ireland was concluded. The salvation he brought to the Empire in February 1914—when certain officers mutinied, a mutiny which he did much to encourage and something to control—was not permanent: “Charlie Hunter came in to say that Milner had said to him, ‘They talk a lot about Gough, but the man who saved the Empire is Henry Wilson.’ ”<sup>183</sup>

How these Irishmen hate one another has always been an astonishment to the English mind. Hatred of the southern Irish and love of himself were the dominating principle of Sir Henry Wilson’s political and military career. Every thought and action were governed by those two twin passions. They poisoned his nature and gave a distorted view of every event. At the Imperial Conference of 1921, he announced, “A voluntary army answered no military problem,”<sup>184</sup> although the British voluntary armies had done pretty well in the war that was just over. He would not have an army at all unless it were obtained by conscription, and he wanted conscription so that he might bring under his command 200,000 Southern Irishmen, as the editor observes, “not merely because the men were so urgently wanted, but also because he believed that

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the measure was called for in the interests of law and order in Ireland itself." <sup>185</sup> He would not have peace with Ireland unless it were accomplished by military force, and he formally set forth the military measures he was prepared to adopt. When the Government was striving by other means to accomplish the same result, the Cabinet to him was merely "murderers' meetings."

It is doubtful if Sir Henry Wilson, holding these opinions, was the best liaison officer. It is doubtful indeed if liaison of any kind with the French ever did any good. Sir Douglas Haig at last found it possible, and necessary, to dispense with all intermediaries, and deal direct with them. Complaisance in the wrong place and at the wrong time begets arrogance. Stiffness has virtue as well as suppleness. The French were led astray by Wilson, so far astray that they came to look upon England as a mere source of supply for material and men, the British Government not as an ally but as a vassal state, the British army as an appendage of mercenary troops who did not even require to be paid.

In the end Sir Henry Wilson himself came to see the result of his complaisant liaison. "These funny

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little Frenchmen" were not so funny as he supposed. In May 1918, he sees that "they mean to take us over body and soul—militarily and economically—numberless signs of interference."<sup>186</sup> Lloyd George was compelled to declare "that he would not be bullied by Clemenceau and Foch."<sup>187</sup> In October, Wilson admits, "It sounds to me as if Haig was right. Foch wants us to do all the work. The French are not fighting at all, and the Americans don't know how, so all falls to us."<sup>188</sup> In August he was obliged to remind his friend Foch that he did not command the British Army.<sup>189</sup> To Clemenceau in April he sent a formal message, "that I was under the Prime Minister of England and not under the Prime Minister of France."<sup>190</sup> And all this was the outcome of the Versailles Council arranged by Wilson and Clemenceau, who "patted me on the head and said I was *un bon garçon*." A good boy—so he translates the term<sup>191</sup>—to the French is a new rôle for the Chief of the Imperial General-staff.

The position of liaison officer between the French and English armies he developed into the position of emissary between the two governments, and gained full scope for his peculiar talents. He was

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in both camps and in both Cabinets; and one who sits in the temple soon comes to show himself as the god. He entertained the belief that men will agree to anything "if they are properly handled." He knew when to persist and when to draw back. This was the suppleness that Sir Almeric Fitzroy observed, and the cleverness which he mistook for praise from Lord Milner.<sup>192</sup> By a partial statement of any given case, he could persuade the British Government to agree, and with that agreement in hand he would exercise pressure upon the French. In another case he would reverse the process, with so much success that Painlevé "accused him of having tried to take charge of the French Government also."<sup>193</sup> One who gets his hand on the lever of a reciprocating engine can exercise great power.

A single example will serve to illustrate this practice of playing one side against the other. In November 1915, Sir John French was in danger of losing his command. It was suggested to him by one conspirator that he should allege in his defence, that his failure on the Western Front was due to the Gallipoli and Salonika operations which the Cabinet had undertaken. Wilson cleverly showed the



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falsity of that move: "I said that in the present condition of the Cabinet they would jump at this and ask him to resign; but that if we could get Joffre to endorse Sir John's views, we had the Cabinet fixed. This was much approved. We finally settled that" another conspirator should go that afternoon to London "and do the private letter business by word of mouth, whilst Sir John settled down to write the big dispatch, and I said I would take it down to Joffre to-morrow night. Sir John took the whole thing most awfully well." <sup>194</sup> At the time, a soldier on his occasional leave wondered what urgent business caused this flitting of staff-officers about the country and across the Channel.

Joffre performed the task allotted to him. But he also was in trouble, as the result of a meeting between the British and French Governments actually in progress in Paris. Wilson then came to his rescue, by impressing "Lloyd George with the danger of doing anything to upset Joffre." Next day he warned Joffre "that we must have no more meetings like yesterday's, which did an infinity of harm, exposing to each Government the ignorance and vacilla-

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tion of the other, and undermining Joffre's authority and position." <sup>195</sup>

Sir Henry Wilson, whilst he was making military plans with the French prior to the War, whilst he was liaison officer with the Expeditionary Force, and later military member at Versailles, and Chief of the General Staff, was a representative of the British Government. His opinions of that Government were governed by their Irish policy alone. Holding such, he was a dangerous emissary; and that danger is proved by the confidences he gave as well as received. To General Pershing he exposed his whole mind about Lloyd George and Ireland, and the American was "terribly upset." <sup>196</sup> But it was with Marshal Foch the most complete confidences were given and received. It was about this time Lloyd George was so "unsatisfactory to the French."

Sir Henry Wilson had long since complicated his military dealings with the French by definitely constituting himself a political agent. When the Irish crisis was at its worst in 1914, before the War, he thought it his duty to go to France "for the express purpose" of explaining the political situation to the

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French Command.<sup>197</sup> Had the Foreign Office or the Cabinet been informed of this intention, they would probably have chosen an agent with less settled opinions and more sympathetic mind. The French-speaking Irishman crossing and re-crossing the Channel has been a figure of ill-omen as far back as the time of the phantom court at St. Germain. The British Government had an accredited ambassador of English breed through whom all necessary knowledge could be conveyed.

During the War, it seems that, in their temerity, a proposal had been made to Millerand by Lord Kitchener, Mr. Churchill, Sir Edward Grey, and Mr. Asquith for the co-operation of the Fleet, a business of which the English might be assumed to have some knowledge. Foch came to see Wilson, December 11th, 1914,<sup>198</sup> "with the precious document. Foch much amused. Of course Foch treats it with the greatest contempt." This emissary does not seem to have conveyed to the French the impression that the English are a proud, if patient, people. But neither Wilson nor the French valued the British Navy very highly. In the year before the War, Wilson thought it might be worth

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500 bayonets. Castelnau and Joffre did not value it at one bayonet. Foch was exactly of the same opinion.<sup>199</sup>

In January 1915, still during the War, he had "a long visit and a long talk" with Foch. Considering the time and the place, the subject was a strange one, namely, the "marked deterioration of the English," as compared with the French and Germans, which they agreed was due to the voluntary system.<sup>200</sup>

After the War, Wilson in Paris was so despairing of his country, that Foch "simply threw up his hands, 'Pauvre Angleterre, pauvre Angleterre,' he kept on repeating. Then he said a thing to me that he would not have said to any other Englishman. 'You break your written word. You cower under the assassin and the Jew. Your friendship is no longer worth seeking. We must go elsewhere.'"<sup>201</sup> Sir Henry would have been more correct in his surmise if he had omitted the word "other" before "Englishman," for there was no Englishman living to whom the French Marshal would have ventured such an opinion. There was "another Englishman" who would even more gladly have received his confi-

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dence—Roger Casement, but he was long since dead.

Marshal Foch supplies the book with a commendatory preface. Marshal Foch might well be called upon to explain his conduct in putting his name and stamp of approval upon a book that is one continuous diatribe against British institutions, methodical defamation of English and Dominion statesmen, and derogation from Imperial soldiers, especially when some of that defamation is published in the book as coming from Marshal Foch's own mouth. It may be at some future time that France will stand in sore need of English alliance. The utterances of Marshal Foch, and of Clemenceau too, if unexplained, will be remembered in that hour. It may then be that the saying ascribed to Marshal Foch will have come true, "We must go elsewhere." 202

In the meantime it may be suggested, in defence of Marshal Foch, that he assumed he was dealing with a *bonhomme*, sincere though boisterous, serious though comical, frank because free in speech. The two had been friends for twelve years. They were intimate and playful. They exchanged head-

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gear and ran around the garden. Wilson wore Foch's kepi. Foch wore Wilson's "billycock, sitting low on his brow as it was too big for him," as the observer is careful to remark.<sup>203</sup> In an excess of playfulness, Foch is reported to have kicked Wilson around the room. Here was an Englishman one could trust, *un vrai bonhomme*, with whom one could safely speak as well as play familiarly. But Foch could not know that, when the play was over, every light and chance word of his was furtively recorded in a diary. And no man should be put to test of a word uttered in the confidence of friendship.

Clemenceau is more harshly treated. Again one would like to know who began the conversation, and how far tacit assent is given as original statement. Certainly the opinion about Lloyd George ascribed to him is singularly like the opinion of Wilson at the moment. "He said Lloyd George was a fool."<sup>204</sup> "He thinks Lloyd George is a fool, and an extra fool."<sup>205</sup> "He said our politicians were fools, but I was a good boy."<sup>206</sup> Even Joffre "thought our strategists were fools."<sup>207</sup> But neither Clemenceau nor Joffre put their names to a book, ascribing



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to them those sentiments toward the Prime Minister of England. Marshal Foch did. The simplest reason is that he did not suspect his friend to have been a *faux bonhomme*, and had not read the book he signed.

Sir Henry Wilson did much political harm during the War; he was powerless to do much military harm. Haig was too strong. He talked, wrote, telephoned, telegraphed, travelled. When he had occasion to transmit a Cabinet decision upon a military matter, he had the wisdom to protect himself by a saving clause, as when he telegraphed to Allenby in Palestine to make a cavalry raid on Aleppo, if he thought fit. Once a war is committed to the soldiers, and public fury is aroused, any single person, however highly placed, is swept aside. War has a power of its own.

To the British delegation at the Peace Conference he applied the term circus; civilians were Frocks. From the opinions of that performance ascribed to others one may judge of his own. He ascribes to Lloyd George the opinion that the Constitution of the League of Nations was "a most ridiculous and preposterous document";<sup>208</sup> and to other equally

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important persons, "the whole thing was terrible; the Frocks have gone mad; Hankey is crazy." His most remarkable shift of nationality occurred at this time. "It was a miserable exhibition of unashamed incompetence; I became a Boche."<sup>209</sup> At Fontainebleau, "in those enjoyable sylvan surroundings," he gave a series of strategical lectures on three successive days. Mr. Lloyd George was amongst those present, and heard the doctrine, "that the United States was to occupy Constantinople and Armenia; Italy was to take charge of the Caucasus."

During the War Sir Henry Wilson was preoccupied with the strategy for another war, in Ireland. Conscription was his plan. When he learned on October 16th, 1918, that the idea was abandoned, "that is simply the devil,"<sup>210</sup> and this strategy required the employment of 150,000 troops for two years. The detail is expressed in the motto he gave for his guidance to the Military Attaché in Japan—Stick to your friends, kill your enemies. He was against haphazard reprisals, and in favour of "reprisals carried out under proper authority—'shooting by roster,' as he expressed it."<sup>211</sup> In his own words, he develops the ideas, "Once the Govern-

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ment shoulders responsibility the reprisals can start in mild form and go on *crescendo* if necessary.”<sup>212</sup> Truly, as he admits, “a foul job for any soldier.”<sup>213</sup> He was indignant at the proposal for a truce on May 11th, “when we are having more success than usual in killing rebels.”<sup>214</sup> The conference with the Irish leaders was “a murderers’ meeting.” Whilst the settlement with Ireland was being discussed at the Colonial Office in February 1922, his dogma was “reconquer Ireland or lose the Empire.” This was the occasion when “Winston jumped in with ‘the way I gloated about reconquest,’ ”<sup>215</sup> and the Empire is not yet lost. He quite gravely suggested in 1916 that General Maxwell should arrest the Secretary for Ireland, “Birrell, and have him shot if convicted.”<sup>216</sup> These details are put forward not as an excuse for his assassination, but as the reason for it.

## IV

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THE diary during the War is dull because there is in it so much talked, so little thought, so little done. At the close of the War it loses interest. The entries become more numerous and reality is lost in comment. As the temper of the writer rises, the style grows worse. The common jargon of the uneducated professional soldier becomes the harsh gibberish of the scolding journalist. The diary becomes dull as a book-keeper's ledger, in which no balance is struck. Something might be recovered for historical audit if the entries were sorted on perforated cards and assembled into categories by a machine such as a large business office employs; but the task is too laborious. The only coherency is a single dark thread, hatred of southern Ireland.

If it were not for the tragical circumstances of his death, the final chapters of the diary would be merely pathetic. He was "never asked to a Cabinet

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now on any subject.”<sup>217</sup> “Curzon has concluded a military convention with the Belgians again without any consultation with us,” although on the same day another Minister was assuring him, that “every one agreed that he was one of the outstanding figures in England, and one of the brightest intellects,” to which he replied, “I never would have thought it by the way the Cabinet had ignored my advice for the last three years.”<sup>218</sup> He was almost alone when he went to the station “to meet the Bull, no high official, no car; it was a scandal.”<sup>219</sup>

In Osborne Bay he fell into the sea, and only saved himself by remembering the shrewd counsel of his father, “the importance of always keeping the mouth shut.”<sup>220</sup> But, “with the exception of Curzon who wrote me a charming letter, not a single member of the Cabinet wrote or telegraphed to me about my being nearly drowned.”<sup>221</sup> His successor was appointed without his advice. He attended a Cabinet meeting, the first in nineteen months. “Lloyd George did not nod at me nor take notice of me, nor I of him,” he adds with spirit. That spirit was not broken by neglect. After an expression of his views to Mr. Chamberlain,<sup>222</sup> “Austen really

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had no reply at all, and I honestly think I turned him inside out." After "tearing to bits" a proposal made by Mr. Churchill, "Winston curled up." <sup>223</sup>

Finally, and "just in the nick of time," he was offered the chance of a seat in the House of Commons to represent North Down. He agreed to accept, provided there would be no opposition. There was none; he was elected. He was now a politician without the uniform of a soldier. He himself had become a Frock. It was not long before he made the melancholy discovery that "the Government was supported in the division lobbies by members who were ready enough to criticize provisions of the Bill unofficially in strong terms." Even with the advantage of "a miserable speech of Winston's," they got only fifteen votes; and in the afternoon he joined "a curious group at tea in the smoking-room, all telling stories." He was now a regular politician.

There were to be further discoveries: "I meant to speak, and had quite a nice speech ready; but the first time I jumped up Austen also arose, and the second time Hugh Cecil rose, so I did not get the chance." In the outer world it was no different. A speech was garbled in three newspapers, "and was



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not mentioned in others, in spite of the efforts made to get publicity; it shows how difficult it is to get a hearing when speaking against Lloyd George."

A young man came to see him from the *Daily Mail*, seeking an interview about Palestine. In his simplicity, he assumed the young man had been "sent by Northcliffe," as it was well known that the noble lord was closely identified with that journal. But he "had no idea that the play-boy was going to put some of my chaffing remarks in so baldly"; and next morning, he confessed he would have preferred that he had not interpolated some of his own stuff.<sup>224</sup> The civil world is a cruel place for the soldier who has become a civilian and politician.

The present writing, in part history, in part biography, confines itself rigidly within the limits of the text from which it is drawn, but with ample reference for the assistance of those who are willing to continue the research for themselves. One who lived on the Western Front for four years, and followed the fate of the army, in performance of a duty no matter how humble, from Ypres to Cologne, inevitably formed an opinion of some kind about

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the leaders in the war. But no opinion of any kind was formed about Sir Henry Wilson, who was never seen, and his name never heard, except in vague rumour, even more vague than the rumour of "Colonel Repington." He would have remained in that great obscurity, had it not been for the publication of his private papers, and if the official praiser in his honesty had not cursed when it was his business to bless.

It must be admitted that, to those humble persons, Sir Douglas Haig himself, with a singular stupidity on the part of his Staff, was made known with a sinister significance. After April 15th, 1915, his Routine Orders in their forefront always presented him to the troops not as the Commander-in-chief but as the Lord-high-executioner. The General Order 4714, of August 8th, 1918, issued by the Adjutant-General's Branch begins, Court-Martial: Private —— and Private —— were tried, convicted; the sentence was "to suffer death by being shot;" the sentence was duly carried out at 5:31 a.m." It will be observed that this was the day upon which the battle of Amiens began; and this was the method employed "to encourage" the troops in that

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most decisive battle of the War, "the black day" of the German army.

A diary, like a man, must be judged as a whole. It is not just to segregate actions or entries, good and bad, into separate categories. In these diaries there is nothing better and nothing worse than that herein set forth. If any injustice is done to Sir Henry Wilson, he himself is the author of it. The diary is accepted as it came from his hand, and published in these two volumes. Laying aside all predilections that arise from the record of his increase in rank from Major-General to Field-Marshal, and the brilliant honours that were conferred upon him, and relying upon the book alone, the inevitable judgment is that he and the editor have created a figure and not a man, an inhuman figure, calculating, callous, without a single generous sentiment or kind word; impersonal, with no suggestion of whom he loved, what scene of beauty he admired. He does not live. He makes of himself, and the editor portrays, a vision he thought he saw: a lay figure standing with long legs apart in nonchalant ease, a great image whose brightness was excellent and the form terrible; sleeves, lapels and breast, radiant with

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signs and symbols—stars, swords, and batons increasing and crossing like the heavenly constellations; and the stone that smote this image was a book that issued forth from the mouth of it.

A writer who left the matter in this condition would be a mere bungler, for it is the business of the critic to suggest that good exists, even where he cannot discern it clearly. In the present case, one must at least attempt, with little help from the book, what the editor entirely fails to do. He has not given in the whole book the faintest proof of that winsomeness in Sir Henry Wilson which he continually ascribes to him. Possibly he took it so fully for granted, as an axiom in his thesis, that he deemed proof superfluous. The task is not easy, for this diary created by the one and given form by the other, it is to be feared, has fixed an opinion which will be difficult to dislodge by any subsequent writing from voluntary and casual hands. And yet, when Sir Henry Wilson puts off the character of the professional soldier and becomes the Irish politician, a gleam of light breaks through, and the studious reader begins to suspect not that he has read wrong, but that the evidence is incomplete.

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An officer holding the humble rank of Major in one of those shadow armies went to Ranchicourt on official business, and was asked to remain to breakfast. In his own house and mess the custom was to have a servant place the frugal coffee-and-rolls before him. He, like Clemenceau, was unprepared for the sumptuous meal, and unaware of the English practice of carrying one's own food. Like the poor man at the feast of Barmecide, he sat staring at the empty plate, to the secret amusement of several persons mentioned in these diaries. Sir Henry Wilson instantly arose, and with his own hands ministered to his guest. It was the act of a kindly man; and this officer reads with anger Sir C. E. Callwell's book which holds up his generous host to obloquy. One could wish that the editor had recorded similar instances of which there must have been many. General Rawlinson at their first meeting in Burma thought him "a very good chap"; and in the emotion aroused by his tragic death refers to him as his most intimate and valued friend and a very distinguished public servant.

An unnamed friend attributes to Sir Henry Wilson the saying, "Asquith hates me after the Ulster

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pogroms, and says that Wilson is the sort of man who would head a revolution. I'm not sure that he isn't right." <sup>225</sup> He was not right. Wilson was approached in 1922 on the subject of assuming definite leadership of the malcontents and refused. <sup>226</sup> Kitchener merely thought him "rather a mischievous fellow"; <sup>227</sup> and the Home Secretary warned Mr. Chamberlain that he "was an awkward fellow to take on," but he was nothing more. He always drew back from the consequence of his own action.

In time of peace, a soldier who fears that an unpleasant duty may be forced upon him is free to resign. Indeed, Wilson thought of that remedy, for as he records <sup>228</sup> "I am more than ever determined to resign, and I cannot think of a really good way of doing it." A sincere revolutionary would have written a letter, and been done with it. An ardour that was cooled by the decision of a lawyer, that Ulster was not entitled to belligerent rights, could never have flamed very high. And at the very end, when he was breathing out threatenings against Ireland and against the Government, the utmost of his rebellion is defined in his own words, "I will not vote at the election." He was nothing more than the



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intellectual revolutionary. His capacity for mischief of which he boasted to Haig, Milner, Robertson, and Smuts,<sup>229</sup> was merely exuberance and the desire to boast, although at times he came on delicate ground. In the Curragh affair he was perilously close to mutiny. Had England not gone to war in 1914, he would have appeared to the French as a spy, and to the English as their abettor. But he liked to believe that he was the mainspring of every action. When the Ulster peril passed, he was jealous of the fame that accrued to Gough and his officers who thought of the simple way to resign, and cites evidence to prove that it was he who "saved the Empire."

In the whole course of the War, he never took an absolute decision, and was never called upon to carry to the end a final decision that was taken elsewhere. His function always was to advise, rarely to order, or to do. If the advice was not taken, he complained; if it was taken and turned out badly—but it rarely was taken. Sir Douglas Haig was too "hostile" and Sir William Robertson too "mulish." He was content with setting forth the alternatives, and they who chose the one or the other assumed

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for the moment that he was in agreement with them. He was for the Western Front, for the Eastern Front, and for both. He was the same in respect of Ireland. He had a strategy that was perfectly clear. He was equally sure it could not be carried out. As early as July 1921, he made the contrary and disabling discovery that "unless we had England entirely on our side, we should not attempt martial law in all its severity, because it would not succeed, and failure meant disaster." Again, he records the opinion "that England was sound and could be roused, but unless England was on our side we would fail and break the army; therefore, unless England was on our side, I was wholly opposed to trying coercion."<sup>230</sup> The Cabinet Minister to whom he was speaking, Worthy he calls him, "said England was not on our side and could not be got on it, and I repeated that it would be madness to try and flatten out the rebels." The British Government had long since made that discovery.

It will not be convincing to say that Sir Henry Wilson wrote these diaries in hyperbole, paradox, and allegory. There is something deeper. He wrote the exact truth of his mood; but he had two natures,

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and those natures were at enmity one with the other, the original nature of the Irishman and the acquired nature of the professional staff-officer. For those who can understand, it is enough to say that he moved in a space of different curvature, where parallel lines meet and the old geometry is inadequate. No man is real to himself. If he were, he would hang himself to a tree, or fall upon the mercy of God. That is the meaning of all the great Confessions from St. Paul to Pascal. All men boast to themselves—even St. Paul of the sin from which he was saved. Sir Henry Wilson boasted of himself to himself in his secret diary; and by a strange perversity the things of which a boaster boasts are always to his discredit. The diary was published, and he was betrayed. It makes of him the Play-Boy of the Western Front.

The final test of a man's nature is his conduct in a supreme emergency, and that conduct often to himself is a revelation of hidden weakness or sudden strength. But in either case, his essential nature is revealed. To most men the emergency never comes, and they go to the end in ignorance of themselves. Every soldier at the front endured the test, and

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nearly all came through triumphant even if death was the proof. Some failed, and discovered in themselves femininity and childishness, known in the earlier days as "shell-shock." There are few who can say that they were during four years without one single moment of secret refusal.

The great emergency came to Sir Henry Wilson on June 22nd, 1922, as he stood on the steps of his house, 36, Eaton Place. He hesitated for a moment, did the wrong thing, and was lost, as a platoon leader might,—and was lost with his whole platoon. Sir Henry was entering his house. He was fired upon. He turned and drew his sword. It was a courageous but fatal gesture. He had not engrained into his nature that swords are obsolete, that flesh and blood will not endure fire. He had not by bodily presence learned the lesson of Loos and the trenches.

Had he acquired by daily familiarity in the trenches a contempt for small arms, that in time became an instinct, he would have gone on his way unmoved by the sound, opened his door, closed it, and summoned the authorized persons. No aspersion could be cast upon his courage, for he was faced by assassins and not by soldiers. Had he been a

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man of intellectual quickness, he would have observed that his assailants were thirty feet away, and remembered that they were under a nervous strain that would render their aim uncertain. Had he been a man of humour and sympathy, he might have left his sword alone, and if he turned at all, addressed to the two men a few firm kind words. They might have changed their minds and gone away. He should have known that they were Irishmen. But this is all surmise. And yet his death was the last link in his life.

A good man as he grows old develops the diffused virtue inherent in him. In a bad man, as he grows old, qualities that in youth are commendable pass over into vice. Thrift becomes avarice; desire greed; emulation jealousy; detraction meanness; criticism malice; dislike hatred; alertness intrigue; caution cowardice; a laudable discontent in the extreme case may slowly and insensibly pass into disloyalty and treason, unless in the meantime kindly death intervenes. That is the Nemesis of the Greek tragedians, and his own book does not make it sufficiently clear which path Sir Henry Wilson would have followed.

But it is of ambition and opportunity all the mor-

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alists bid the young to beware: ambition, the last infirmity even of minds that are noble; and opportunity:

“O Opportunity, thy guilt is great . . .  
And in thy shady cell, where none may spy him,  
Sits Sin, to seize the souls that wander by him.”

All eulogists agree that the young Wilson was ambitious and eager to make the most of opportunity. The Diary throughout its long length discloses to what extent he avoided the perils inherent in those qualities.

During the forty years that Sir Henry Wilson was expending his labour upon these diaries, with the intention of creating a monument for himself, he little knew the inscription that should be inscribed upon it: “Seekest thou great things for thyself: seek them not,”—which might well be inscribed too upon his less permanent monument in St. Paul’s, where he lies so proudly with Roberts, Wolseley, Nelson, Wellington, and Napier—but not with Haig. A man writes a diary with the intention of creating a monument: he may erect a scaffold instead, and secure contrary fame from that eminence.



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“Le bon Dieu est Boche,” he wrote after “an anxious day.” That is not true either, for there is a depth in the wisdom and knowledge of God that is not peculiarly *boche*, and a judgment that was unsearchable by Sir Henry Wilson when he was writing these diaries: “For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known. Therefore, whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light. And I say unto you, my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear”: Let a man fear himself.

## I: SIR HENRY WILSON

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## II. COLONEL HOUSE

CITIZEN—DIPLOMAT—IN QUEST—SUSPENSE  
—DECISION

Ridentem dicere verum quid vetat?  
[HORACE, *Sat.* I. I, 24].

*The Intimate Papers of Colonel House, arranged as a Narrative.* By Charles Seymour, Sterling Professor of History, Yale University. (Benn, Vols. 1 and 2, 1927. Houghton Mifflin Company, Vols. 1 and 2, pp. 978.)





COLONEL HOUSE

# I

## CITIZEN

WHY do the Europeans rage and the nations of Europe imagine vain things;—that is the problem that always perplexed the American historian and the American citizen alike. Why the United States entered into the European War is a problem that still perplexes European historians, and is now beginning to perplex the Americans themselves. The answer to the second problem is to be found in the *Intimate Papers of Colonel House*, so intelligently selected and arranged as a narrative and so admirably displayed by Professor Charles Seymour.

The most unlettered European in any of the ten nations engaged in the War can give, and has given, an account completely adequate to himself of the causes that impelled him to take up arms and the objects he hoped to achieve. In the five larger nations the response was instant. In England there was a moment of indecision; but there was not even

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a momentary doubt whether it would be against Germany or against France. The question whether they would fight at all, and which side they should take, tormented the Americans for more than two years. It was continually present in the mind of the President, even whilst he was determined to preserve the most intense neutrality.

In the end, the United States went to war in spite of themselves, and for no single overwhelming reason, such as made decision easy for England, France, and Belgium, and even for Germany itself. The history of the American participation is therefore intricate and elusive; the historian must investigate the American mind and especially the mind of Woodrow Wilson, penetrating far into political thought and into the abysmal depths of human consciousness, *abyssus humanæ conscientiæ*.

These papers of Colonel House will occupy the historian so long as interest endures in the events of those great days; but it is to the Americans they will be of most value; they are a revelation of the American mind, a history of themselves, and history is the master to whom all, even Americans, must go—history with pensive and melancholy face.



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The material of this narrative is deposited in Yale University, filed and catalogued—a daily journal of two thousand pages covering a period of eight momentous years, sheaves of letters from every important European statesman, correspondence with all American ambassadors and members of the Cabinet, and finally, a complete collection of the letters, intimate and affectionate, that passed between Colonel House and the President himself.

The book is, therefore, authentic. The papers may be examined for all time by any accredited person, and the good faith of Professor Seymour is beyond doubt. It can never be alleged that his book is an imagined thing, created, as the method of the satirist is, out of hypothetical and fancied documents without real existence, a political Pilgrim's Progress by some secular Bunyan, or a social allegory by some more genial Swift. And yet, this book is strange as theirs.

Colonel House, a private person, with no public office and desiring none, spurning any visible reward, was welcomed by kings, trusted by statesmen, besought by politicians, and consulted by financiers and soldiers alike; and he never wilfully betrayed

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a confidence that was reposed in him. He passed over those troubled waters like a dove that might bear an olive leaf of hope, or an angel from whom some tidings of peace was desired. He moved along ways hitherto untrod, a wandering voice in an unsubstantial world, babbling a tale of visionary hours. He was a mystery. Had he in good season retired across the Rio Grande into the wilderness, he would have endured as a political saint, and saints are mysterious to the end—had he not published these Intimate Papers.

The intent of the present writing is to show the mystery in small compass, to answer for the otherwise bewildered future historian how it came to pass that Colonel House attained to a position of power so immense, the familiar of European kings, the confidant of despairing statesmen, enemy and allied, the secret emissary to warring nations, the over-lord of American ambassadors, the single person whom the American President trusted, and the American people regarded with homage and awe. The answer lies in that very European despair, the personality of the President, of Colonel House himself, in the naïveté of the American people, and in

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the peculiar nature of their Constitution and institutions. The place was prepared for him.

The President of the United States is now, and was even at the time when the Russian Czar and the German Kaiser held sway over their respective peoples, the one surviving monarch in the world, with this distinction only, that he is elective and they were hereditary. In the person of this one man is vested by traditional practice as well as by law the chief executive power. The final expression of this power is the making of war. Although a declaration of war is the prerogative of Congress, the President may at any time take action which results in hostilities; and there is nothing left for Congress but to recognize that a state of war in fact does exist. Congress never declared war against Germany. On March 27th, 1917, Colonel House records, "The President asked whether I thought he should ask Congress to declare war, or whether he should say that a state of war exists, and ask them for the necessary means to carry it on. I advised the latter. I was afraid of an acrimonious debate if he puts it up to Congress to declare war." <sup>1</sup>

But no monarch has ever been sufficient unto him-

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self. The burden of absolute monarchy is too great. There must be a lesser person to stand between the sovereign and his people, "a burden-bearer." To the most insignificant Arabian principality this personage was a convenience; and his employment quickly spread to the Persians, Turks, and Mongols. In a nation so large as the United States and with responsibilities so vast, his presence was a necessity. Indeed, the Arabic writers found divine sanction for the office. Aaron was the *wazír*, or vizier, or burden-bearer for Moses. Colonel House was that one for Woodrow Wilson. The burden of the President was, that he alone could "lead out" the peoples of Europe; and by a transference of thought Colonel House three times speaks of him as a "son of man."<sup>2</sup> When Woodrow Wilson took upon himself for the good of humanity, the management of the world, Colonel House was compelled to assume the government of the United States, and in moments of stress to assist in the larger operation as well.

It was not by accident the President was alone in the emergency of war. By the design of the Constitution he was supreme, and that supremacy was

intentional. The principle at the time was stubbornly contested by those who would deny to the President power greater than has been possessed by an English king since Henry VIII. Those early Democrats were roughly caricatured by Alexander Hamilton, as holding the belief that a President was being created "with attributes superior in dignity and splendour to those of a king of Great Britain. He has been shown to us with the diadem sparkling on his brow and the imperial purple flowing in his train. He has been seated on a throne surrounded by minions and mistresses in all the supercilious pomp of majesty."<sup>3</sup> The opponents of the federal idea were right in their appraisal of the more than kingly power conferred upon the President, although the diadem and the purple, the minions and the mistresses, janizaries and seraglio, which they feared, have not become features of American ceremonial or of official society, due, as Professor H. A. Smith expounds in his *Federalism*, to a tradition of simplicity and pressure of public opinion upon the behaviour of public men.

The President was alone too, because an American president has no Cabinet. He has merely a num-

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ber of secretaries, whom he appoints at his discretion and can dismiss at his own pleasure. Although the Senate must technically approve the appointments, that body cannot prevent dismissal. They may not sit in either House; the President may demand a written opinion from them; he is not bound to follow their advice; his relation to them is that of superior to subordinates; he is "the absolute master of his own conduct, and may observe or disregard the counsel given to him at his sole discretion." Finally he can veto all legislation. Besides being irresponsible, the President is practically irremovable. The attempt was made in 1868, and failed. True, his conduct may be brought under review if he should choose to seek election for a second term of four years; in his final term there is no such check.

Government of any kind was so hateful to the Fathers of the Republic, that they deliberately designed for themselves, not a system that would work, but a system that would not work, unless by some unforeseen accident, such as occurred in 1912, when the Democrats found themselves in possession of the presidency and a majority in both Houses of



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legislation. That fortunate conjunction had not occurred since the Civil War, and Mr. Wilson had the means of putting into effect important measures governing tariff, and income tax, currency, and reserve banks, whereby the trusts were effectively curbed, and the Democrats absolved from the financial heresies associated with the name of W. J. Bryan. But in less happy circumstances, there must be some operation of the machine by some kind of foreman, who in time came to be known as "the boss." Wilson was his own boss, and he appointed Colonel House as his substitute. The position was well understood, and both President and people were happy in the choice.

The affinity of Woodrow Wilson with Colonel House had a firm basis. They were both "good men," in the sense that the term is understood in the United States. There are good men and bad men in the world, and good men are attracted one to the other. In all of Colonel House's Intimate Papers there is not a single mean word or one mean thought. His hands were clean of any ill-gotten gain. When he went to Europe on his momentous mission, the sum of four thousand dollars of public

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money was given to him, and he did not like it. He preferred to pay his own expenses, but could not quite afford it. He had no desire to advance his own interest or the interest of any friend to the detriment of the public good. He had no interest of his own to advance; he was without ambition, save the ambition of all good men, the attainment of consideration in the minds of other good men. He was without small vanity. He asked nothing from his powerful friend; he wanted nothing; he accepted nothing. A nation willing to endure a dictator could not have had a better one.

Colonel House had learned the business of politics in Texas which is a simple community; and as the United States is merely an extension of Texas, he found himself quite at home in national affairs. But when he came upon the European stage, his early experience was not only inadequate; it was misleading. A man of genius can create an imaginary world of his own, in which he will move with ease and security; but by no power of genius can he enter into a real world and find himself at home. Persons who are born and bred in one civilized country can enter into another civilized country, and

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by the aid of an alert and sympathetic mind understand and find their way. Therefore Colonel House did not understand the complex structure of Europe. He lacked experience, and Europe was so unlike Texas, he had no standards for his guidance. Rather, the standards he had were not applicable. He found Europe in arms; he had lived to middle age in Texas where every boy and man went armed. He had seen Texas abandon the practice; he thought Europe could as easily be persuaded to follow their example.

Colonel House was born in a world of strife. "Firearms," he says, "were our toys and death our playmate; there were no childish games excepting those connected with war." Twice he came near killing one of his playmates; his eldest brother had the side of his face shot off. The fire-bells would ring as a sign of a riot, and the citizens assemble all armed to the teeth. When he went to school in Virginia, at the age of fourteen, he carried a pistol and a large knife with which he held the rougher boys at bay. One of their boyish diversions was a pretence of hanging pushed to the point of reality. "Murder was rife everywhere; there was no law; there was

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no order." When his father visited his next-door neighbour, "he always reached for his shotgun or six-shooter, and held it ready to shoot both going and coming." <sup>4</sup>

In his early boyhood he knew personally many of the famous desperadoes, men who had killed so many that they had almost ceased to count their victims. There were two types of killers, "one that murdered simply for the pure love of it, and others that killed in the way of their duty." <sup>5</sup> It appears that there was a third type, who only killed upon insult or fancied insult, and these were "usually gentle, mild-mannered, mild-spoken, and often delicate men." Duels were frequent. "George Tarver's brother and his room-mate had some slight quarrel over the bed they occupied in common. 'Here, you can't put those boots on the bed,' said George's brother. 'I can if I choose,' was the reply. They went out, stood back to back, counted aloud, walking ten paces, wheeled, fired, and advanced upon one another. They fell dead almost in one another's arms. They were good friends a quarter of an hour before the duel." <sup>6</sup>

The nearest Colonel House ever came to killing

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a man is well described by himself.<sup>7</sup> "I was in a saloon. . . . I had my overcoat on, and had my hand on my six-shooter in my pocket and cocked it. In five seconds more, I would have killed him. The owner of the saloon jumped over the bar between us. An explanation followed."<sup>8</sup> In the European War Colonel House took upon himself the office of the peacemaking saloon-keeper, but the cause of that war was deeper than he surmised. It was not a misunderstanding. The real reason was that the combatants understood one another only too well. The peacemaker was a conventional figure in Texas society. Colonel House, as a boy, would incite quarrels between his playmates for the very pleasure of composing them. But in that society, men desired to be reconciled; they were content by peace with honour and without victory; they fought without adequate cause and without object; and as they became more civilized, they grew bold enough to refuse.

Europeans were different, and hard to understand. Equally, they could not understand Colonel House. The Germans did not understand his status; the French half understood; the English knew it

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wholly. The Germans could not even get into their heads that the term "Colonel" in the United States did not necessarily imply a military status. "Most of my time at luncheon," he records,<sup>9</sup> "was used in explaining to my neighbours the kind of Colonel I was—not a real one in the European sense, but, as we would say in America, a geographical one. My explanation finally reached Falkenhayn's consciousness, but my neighbour from Saxony was hopelessly befuddled and continued until the last to discuss army technique."

They had not learned that in the Southern States every man of middle age, upright carriage, grey hair, "clean cut" face and bright eye is "Colonel"; an old man with flowing beard, spectacles, and kindly face, "Doctor"; all other intellectual persons, "Professor," and if they are correctly dressed, "Captain." The rank of colonel had been conferred upon House by Governor Hogg of Texas, "by appointing him, entirely without the recipient's permission, to his staff. The staff-officer's uniform could be, and was, bestowed upon an ancient and grateful darkey, but the title proved to be adhesive."<sup>10</sup> The Germans could not be expected to understand this informality



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of military rank, or the informal peace that was proposed to them.

Colonel House loved politics as a boy loves a game. Any American boy may become President, and politics is the road to that high eminence. If an English boy might aspire to be king, he would strive to develop kingly qualities as he conceived them to be, even at the risk of wasting his energy, when he might be engaged in a more useful, if less lofty, occupation. The young House "was intoxicated by a passion for politics and public affairs; he read politics, talked politics, and in his first year at the grammar school, a boy of seventeen, he brought himself into close contact with the mechanism of politics." He would go to New York and hang about Democratic headquarters, listening to Tilden, Blaine, and Bayard. His companion was a boy named Morton, whose father in 1876 hoped for the Republican candidacy for President. There were visits to Washington, where the two boys had entrance to the Capitol and the White House. He was not impressed by what he saw and heard. He turned away from a political career. The reason he gives, "My ambition has been so great that it has never seemed

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worth while to satisfy it," is not the true one. The real reason is given in a previous sentence, "I felt that I would fall short of the first place, and nothing less would satisfy me."<sup>11</sup> He made a just and modest appraisal of his defects: he always wore his hat when he had a picture taken. Therefore he was content to do nothing, to become an amateur. He wanted the palm of victory without the dust of the arena, and he secured it. This spirit of renunciation is common to young men who perceive that their ability is not equal to their vague longings. They either fear their fate too much, or their desert is small. He failed too in his studies. He could not enter Yale, and did not graduate from Cornell. Had he not been born to "a comfortable fortune," he would have been doomed to the disaster in store for all young persons who will not do the work that lies next to their hands, whereby the next work becomes easy. At the age of twenty-three, in the year 1881, he married his wife. He had other ambitions.

In his native state, to which he returned the following year, Colonel House soon became the Democratic political nucleus. His father had left him "a comfortable fortune," which he increased by use-

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ful and judicious enterprises until he became one of the wealthy men of Texas. In the metropolitan city of Austin he had attained the highest social position to which any man could aspire. His courage was unquestioned; he had come within five seconds of killing a man. His manners were affable; in a country where every honour is elective, affability is the first law. His courtesy was perfect; a Southern gentleman in those days learned to be courteous if he valued his life. His integrity was proven by a hard test; he had built a small railway with the help of capable and honest men, and divided the profits with them. The public became friends, not enemies; all honest claims were adjusted without the aid of lawyers; dishonest claims found no sympathy with any jury along the line of road.<sup>12</sup>

By this spirit of rectitude, modesty, and native wisdom Colonel House, without any obvious effort on his own part, found himself the confidant of successive governors, feared by both political parties, and trusted by the people. In those years Texas emerged from the condition of a frontier and lawless state, and became a legislative model for the older states of the Union. The power of corporations was

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broken; railroads were controlled by a commission; issues of stock and bonds were freed from fraud; municipal government was transferred to technical managers under the "Galveston plan"; and these reforms were extended into the wider national life. All this was the work of the much-abused "politicians" gravitating around Colonel House, who now, after thirty years of local experience, felt free to engage in a larger adventure.

In 1912, the Democrats were in sore need of a candidate for President. Three times W. J. Bryan had led them to defeat. Woodrow Wilson was being talked of as his successor. Six years earlier, Colonel Harvey had picked him for a winner, as the one "combining the activities of the present with the sobering influences of the past." In these circumstances, Colonel House took upon himself the gratuitous labour of looking "about for a proper candidate for the Democratic nomination of President,"<sup>13</sup> but every Democrat in the United States was engaged in the same search. He mentally dismissed one by reason of ill health; another was reputed to be "brusque even to rudeness," and in discussion disclosed an "erratic and whimsical nature," but

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they had "a dinner at the Lotos Club; it was a delightful affair; the food and wine were of the best." To a member of that famous club this reminiscence reads like a sentence from Herodotus.

Colonel House "now turned to Woodrow Wilson, then Governor of New Jersey, as being the only man who in every way measured up to the office."<sup>14</sup> He had observed his ambitious reform programme; he had no political record, and therefore no political enemies; his troubled career at Princeton proved him an opponent of aristocratic privilege; his speeches might be classed with the finest political rhetoric extant. He had the capacity for moral leadership.<sup>15</sup> House was convinced that he had found his man. It required no great capacity to discover that Wilson was the inevitable candidate. But there was something in reserve. "The trouble with getting a candidate," he wrote, "is that the man best fitted for the place cannot be nominated and, if nominated, could not probably be elected. The people seldom take the man best fitted for the job; therefore it is necessary to work for the best man who can be nominated and elected. Wilson seems to be that man." This observation is obvious rather

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than profound; but Colonel House was always striving for the ideal, and in striving sometimes found something better. He returned to Texas, "spoke to all his political friends, and lined them up one after another," although he had not yet seen his candidate.

Let any one who is disposed to speak lightly of Woodrow Wilson attempt to fill a professor's chair in a first-rate American University for twelve years; to preside over that university for eight years more; to be elected governor of the State in which he lived for twenty years: to be chosen President of the United States for one term of four years, and upon his record for a second term, and all without family connection, political influence, or personal fortune—if he succeed in that, history will speak well of him. Woodrow Wilson did all this in virtue of the innate power that was within him, and he performed the duties of the earlier offices with vigour, if not with complete success.

And that power was the power of character. By that power he brought a new credit to learning and teaching; he replaced at Princeton an outworn tradition of idleness by the fresh practice of study;



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and by his writings he shed a new light upon the political institutions of his country. In those twelve years, from 1890 to 1902, he set the style for all subsequent teaching in American universities, and by the publication of at least ten important books demonstrated that the function of a university is the advancement as well as the preservation of thought. By common consent and general recognition he was chosen to preside over Princeton in 1902, the first layman since its foundation in the year 1746, who filled that place. In the eight years that followed, he learned to accept defeat without losing courage.

By nature and training, he always went to the root of a matter, and therefore he was willing to accept for himself the designation of Radical. He believed that control of public affairs should be vested once more in the people, and the name Democrat was conferred upon him. For fourteen years a Republican had governed New Jersey. The Democrats were desperate for office, and realized that, of three million citizens in that State, Woodrow Wilson was the only man who could put him out. They nominated him for Governor in 1911. He assured them that he would destroy the political system by

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which both parties were organized; but they did not believe him; they regarded the assurance as a shrewd political bid for Republican votes. They heard with secret amusement, and delight at their own perspicacity in having chosen a candidate so deliciously cynical, his speech of acceptance: reorganization and economy; equal taxation; control of corporations; employers' liability; incorrupt elections; franchises subject to public service. To complete the jest, they asked him what he proposed to do with the "boss" and the "machine." He replied, as if it were a lesson well learned, that he would destroy the boss and break the machine. He had in addition the secret assistance of his Princeton friends, and enemies too, who thought his radical activities could be better employed in a less academic sphere. He was elected. Within forty-eight hours he destroyed the boss and broke the machine. Within two years his six principles became law, and New Jersey was the best governed state in the Union.

Woodrow Wilson was a democrat; he believed in democracy. His faith was in the people. He thought of himself as their mouth, their guide, their

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leader. His sole function was to show them the right way, with full trust in their wisdom and in their desire to follow him. The politicians, even the best of them, were a self-constituted body that came between him and the people, thwarting his purposes and theirs. He was filled with vague thoughts, high intentions, and large desires. He meditated in secret upon those principles, devising methods by which they might be accomplished. His final method was an appeal to the people. On two great occasions he had complete success. Twice he was elected President. On four minor occasions the method did not fail him. When he was elected Governor of New Jersey, he broke the power of the politicians by a mere proclamation in the newspapers. When he became convinced, sorely against his will, that the traditional policy of American isolation from world affairs was at an end, he declared for "a navy incomparably the greatest in the world," and an army of 800,000 troops to be kept at full strength by rigid conscription. Upon this tremendous issue of non-committal preparedness he again appealed to the people in January 1916, by direct speech throughout the Union. There were "monster pa-

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rades," as the American custom is, and the President himself marched at the head of the Washington procession carrying a United States flag. Upon this policy of "peace and preparedness" he was elected president for a second term. In both of these elections Colonel House was the consoling hand.

Between the Convention and the election in 1912, the politicians were of so little account to Wilson, that they could be left to Colonel House, as importunate visitors might be left by the master of a place to his butler. But there was one possible candidate who could not be so easily disposed of. That was Mr. Bryan. His control was the hardest task assigned to Colonel House. Mr. Bryan was the one serious opponent; but Colonel House had close "contacts" with him. Thirteen years previously, "Mr. Bryan's daughter, Grace," he records,<sup>16</sup> "had not been well, and he wished to spend a winter in the South. I undertook to arrange a home for the Bryans practically within the same grounds as ours; so he, Mrs. Bryan, and the children lived next to us during the winter. I found Mrs. Bryan very amenable to advice and suggestion, but Mr. Bryan was

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wildly impracticable as ever. He feels that his ideas are God-given; a man who did not believe in his ideas was either a fool or a knave."

Mr. Bryan's approval was essential to Wilson's candidature and election in 1912, and "House worked ceaselessly to secure it. The intimacy with Bryan now proved of inestimable value, for he knew exactly which of Wilson's qualities would attract him;" he laid especial emphasis on the reactionary forces that were fighting both Bryan and Wilson. "It was understood," House writes, "that I should nurse Bryan. I removed several obstacles, and got him in almost as good an attitude as one could desire." <sup>17</sup> Mr. Bryan was now in Jamaica, and Colonel House wrote to him a series of letters, the best of which is printed and then given in summary by the editor: "There was in it a cleverness which might escape the too casual reader. In the form of simple narrative Colonel House underlined the activities of Hearst, who was anathema to Bryan, and emphasized Hearst's preference for Clark over Wilson; he indicated the interest Wall Street exhibited in the defeat of Wilson; he concluded by an assumption that Bryan would naturally align himself with

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the forces that stimulated the enmity of Hearst and Wall Street."

Mr. Bryan in reply was glad to learn that Wilson recognized the common enemy; he was not sorry to hear that "Wilson was almost brutal" to a supporter whose zeal might do him harm. At a banquet Wilson "in a speech of rare distinction emphasized the admiration all good Democrats felt towards Mr. Bryan;" and Colonel House praised Bryan for his conduct in a difficult situation: "Your friends all knew your bigness of mind and heart, but it was an object lesson to those who thought of you differently." To Wilson Colonel House wrote of Mr. Bryan who was then in Texas, "Please let me know if there is anything you would like to have suggested to him, for there can be no better place to do this than by the quiet fireside." To the manager of the campaign he wrote, "I agree with you that Mr. Bryan's support is absolutely essential not only for the nomination but for election afterwards; I shall keep in touch with him and endeavour to influence him along the lines desired."

In April 1912, Colonel House saw Mr. Bryan in New York, and "persuaded him to declare his be-



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lief, that either Clark or Wilson would be an acceptable candidate. I could not get him to go further than this, although I pointed out that all his enemies were in the combination to defeat Wilson. Mrs. Bryan helped me in getting a favourable decision." House "could not avoid the suspicion that Mr. Bryan regarded it as a good Democratic year, and would not scorn the nomination."<sup>18</sup> In June, however, he was able to comfort Wilson with a letter he had from Mrs. Bryan in which she said, "I found Mr. B. well and quite in accord with the talk we had." At the Convention in Baltimore on June 25th, 1912, Tammany "attacked Wilson with such vigour that Bryan was finally convinced that Wilson must be the right man. This intervention proved decisive." Colonel House was not present. He sailed for Europe the day the convention opened. Success would bring him all he desired. Failure could not be laid to his charge.

After the election in November 1912, President Wilson was earnest over large designs. The Cabinet was of little concern to him. Colonel House could attend to that. But again Mr. Bryan must not be neglected. After the convention, Mrs. Bryan wrote

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to the Colonel, "the people regard him as a hero; he is filling Chautauqua dates in larger crowds than he has ever had." But the President did not want him in the Cabinet; he thought he would be of great service in Russia. There was no workable "plan for disposing of Bryan"; he was finally appointed Secretary of State, and "was as pleased with his new place as a child with a new toy. He is really a fine man, full of democratic simplicity and of a fervently religious nature. Mrs. Bryan is 'the salt of the earth.' She has all the poise and good common sense which is lacking in her distinguished husband." <sup>19</sup> The wisdom of keeping Mr. Bryan in the Cabinet was apparent when the Federal Reserve Act was passed. His sense of loyalty kept him from an attack upon the plan "which he never entirely understood; but with his influence in the party he could have destroyed the measure."

The Cabinet was largely the work of Colonel House. The President after meditating in secret went to Bermuda on his own private business, and "House set seriously to work investigating the claims and capacities of the applicants for office from lowest to highest. Much of the work was intensely uncom-

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fortable.”<sup>20</sup> But he went warily. As Senator Gore said, “he can walk on dead leaves, and make no more noise than a tiger.”<sup>21</sup> He was “overwhelmed with office-seekers.” One scorned a place worth 6,000 dollars a year. Another abused a rival viciously. One who himself was driven crazy by lesser office-seekers was willing to accept an Embassy to Vienna, Italy, or anywhere, if only he had the money. Turkey would do for another; but in the Balkan imbroglio it was feared “there ain’t going to be no Turkey”; and the counter-suggestion was offered, that they “let him go and look for it.” For Mr. Bryan, Russia was discovered as a suitable place. Mr. Tumulty spent five hours discussing his own appointment as Secretary to the President, but he had to admit that Wilson had received between five and six hundred letters of protest. An interesting visitor was one who had “a plan for disposing of Bryan.”<sup>22</sup>

The Democrats had been out of power for twenty years; indeed, except for the presidency of Grover Cleveland for more than fifty. They were hungry for office, and the old dogma, “to the victors belong the spoils” was yet in force. In this long obscurity

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few statesmen were bred, and many persons of promise had migrated to the Republican side. Woodrow Wilson "set his jaw" against the doctrine that political service to a party is adequate warrant for public office, and this recalcitrancy seemed monstrous to those who had worked so hard for his election. They had seen in other days the whole administration down to the meanest day-labourer walk the plank like a gang of pirates, and Wilson's determination, that in the exercise of his legal power he would appoint to office the best men available, irrespective of their service to the party and even of their abstention from that service, was to them an act of ingratitude, disloyalty, and treachery towards an established institution.

It was Woodrow Wilson who broke that bad regime. The United States has now a Civil Service which by permanency and supervision is comparable with that in European countries. This was his great act of courage, and he could not have performed it apart from Colonel House, who in his own amiable but implacable way convinced the intransigents that the President was master and they were helpless. If he disappointed many Democrats

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he won the confidence of more Republicans, which freed him from party trammels and in the end secured his election for a second term.

To all reasonable men the disruption of the public service every four years by the automatic dismissal of persons who had learned something of their business to give place to others who knew nothing was a grotesque farce that was no longer amusing, when public affairs had become a highly technical service. Hitherto it had been a point of honour to leave no opponent in office. The warden of Dannemora prison in the great day of Cleveland's victory was taunted in the hearing of the present writer, that he had retained a Republican Methodist as one of the two chaplains. It was very easy, he said, to appoint a Catholic Democrat for priest, but he would in time secure a Democrat Methodist, even if he had to go to hell to find him.

The difficulties facing President Wilson and Colonel House were of a somewhat similar nature. "Mr. Bryan was much distressed when I told him that Wilson had offered the Chinese mission to Dr. Charles W. Eliot. He thought it the poorest selection that could be made, for the reason that Eliot

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was a Unitarian and did not believe in the divinity of Christ.”<sup>23</sup> And yet Mr. Bryan was earnest in his advice that a “Catholic, and perhaps a Jew, be taken into the family.”<sup>24</sup> A person considered suitable would not become Secretary for War “in deference to his Quaker principles.”<sup>25</sup> Walter H. Page could not be Secretary of the Interior, as he was a Southerner, and must not be allowed to control the pensions for a war that ended nearly fifty years before. Therefore, he was sent to England as ambassador. At the same time, however, the President was operating on his own account. He selected Josephus Daniels for the navy. To Page he said, “You do not seem to think that Daniels is Cabinet timber.” “He is hardly a splinter,” Page replied. The appointment of the Secretary for War was more regular. “Tumulty suggests, and we are going to look up a New Jersey man, and see whether he will fill the bill.”<sup>26</sup> He did, for in the evening Tumulty telephoned that the President had appointed him. The end was not yet. Federal judges must be appointed. Colonel House presented a candidate to the Attorney-General; “his only objection to him was that he had no chin; two men I sent him last week



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as candidates for Marshals seemed to be all right excepting that they were too fat; I have another suggestion to make, but the man has a large mole on the back of his ear." <sup>27</sup> The difficulties were equally great when the Federal Reserve Board was being formed. Colonel House was compelled to advise the President that one applicant was too old; another was a crank; another would not bear inspection; yet others had been endorsed by eminent people and even by members of Congress. The assent of the President was prompt: "Let us eliminate him without further discussion." <sup>28</sup>

At this point appear certain disquieting entries in the Intimate Papers concerning the President: I have come in contact with minds of greater initiative and imagination; he is always complaining of forgetfulness; he dodges trouble; the intensity of his prejudices against people, many and often unjust; a man with a one-track mind; too casual; does the most important things without much reflection; had not prepared his speech; some time he will make a serious blunder; does not drink, never smokes; cold and indifferent; lives in an imaginary world; a thing should be so, and it is so; the casual

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way in which he is making up his Cabinet: I can see no end of trouble unless he proceeds with more care; and an ominous flash, "but I happen to be President." Colonel House is careful to insist that his advice went so far and no farther; that he never pressed, seldom ventured, but always contrived to be ready with well-based and well-reasoned advice when it was sought. Wilson knew and valued his own power. House came in the way of that power twice. On the earlier occasion, there is an unexplained hiatus in the correspondence. The last was at the Peace Conference in Paris in 1919. The two friends did not meet again. There are various legends: that Wilson, when he called on Clemenceau, found House in possession and was compelled to wait; that his young men were indiscreet; that House made a statement of his concessions to the Italian Government, which was at variance with a document which Wilson had in his pocket; that there was now a more intimate person to keep his door, who was even competent to sign official papers with her own hand. Unfortunately, Wilson's letters to House are not in the book. The legal right to publish them rests with his executors.

## II

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NEVER before in a single year had so much important legislation been enacted into law as in 1913; and still more strange, it was doing good rather than harm. The people were content. President Wilson and Colonel House were now free to direct their minds to world affairs. England immediately swam into their ken. The Hay-Pauncefote Treaty, guaranteeing equality of all ships passing through the Panama Canal, the English thought, had been violated by the exemption of American shipping from the payment of tolls. England, according to Ambassador Spring-Rice, "would perhaps lose" by a correct observance of the treaty, but must insist as part of their general policy in dealing with large and small nations alike.<sup>29</sup> The American Ambassador in London, Mr. Page, was equally insistent. He had written to House a year ago,<sup>30</sup> "Unless we do

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these things, they will regard us as mean, stingy, and dishonourable, peculiar and given to queer freaks."

But in Congress the President discovered a Senator "who constantly regards himself as an Irishman contending against England." House set to work upon that one, through a son-in-law who had just received a lucrative office, and "diplomatically showed him reasons." But Wilson went direct to Congress and said, that the meaning of the Treaty was not in question outside of the United States, and they were "too big, too powerful, too self-respecting," to interpret the words of their own promises just because they had power enough to read them as they pleased.<sup>31</sup> Those are the words and that the conduct of a courageous man in such an issue. Besides, he desired the support of England in his policy for Mexico, Central and South America.

That policy was an extension of the Monroe Doctrine as far as Cape Horn, a pan-American alliance of twenty-three republics against European aggression and internal revolution. It was to this aspect of politics Colonel House now turned his attention. In a single day he secured the subscription of several States. The Brazilian Ambassador was easy of con-

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quest. Naon, the Argentine Ambassador, was very easy. After the telephone rang, Colonel House "hurriedly gathered what data he could about Argentine and upon Naon himself." In the few minutes at his disposal he learned enough to compliment Naon upon the advanced thought in his country; he believed it was fifty or a hundred years ahead of Europe; he marvelled at the statesmanship of the Argentine in the hour of victory, in discovering that a victorious nation had no moral right to despoil the territory of the vanquished." His quick eye had even caught the name Uruguay and the year 1864. This was his method in making "fertile soil upon which to sow the seeds of his argument." Naon agreed, but Chile refused to sign; there was a boundary dispute with Peru, and she preferred the usual way of settlement. To surrender the right of going to war was to accept a condition of tutelage.

Colonel House was about to leave for Europe on a holiday, as it was understood, "that when the matter had been pretty well buttoned-up, he would step aside and have the President and Mr. Bryan act officially." On his return he found nothing done. Mr. Bryan "acquiesced in a most generous way"

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in the proposal that Colonel House and the President should continue "the linking up of the western hemisphere"; but after that he got off on prohibition, and his host "was glad to take him to his office and proceed to other business."<sup>32</sup> But presently the "pact seemed dead for the moment; it slipped into a forgotten grave."<sup>33</sup> His first essay in diplomacy had failed; and yet out of this vague failure in welding the western hemisphere—less the British Dominion and Colonies—together, arose the larger design for welding together Europe and the whole world. He and Wilson in "executive session" had formulated the pan-American Pact. Wilson wrote it down with his pencil, and "then went to his little type-writer and made a copy of what he had written." In this House found the germ of the Covenant of the League of Nations.<sup>34</sup>

Neither House nor Wilson was discouraged by their failure in South America; but their next failure, which was in Mexico, was hard to bear. If there were any justification at all for this dual Manichean doctrine of interference and non-interference, it was to be found in Europe, where on the one hand Belgium and France were, like the Mexicans,



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resisting as well as they could the interference of Germany with their internal affairs; and on the other, Germany was forcing invasion for the good of those unhappy countries. Mr. Wilson had not yet learned that American culture enforced by war or threat of war is not more tolerable than any other alien culture enforced. The idea dominant in his mind, and in the mind of Colonel House, too, was the good of humanity, but he was continually amazed by the dislike humanity has against having good done to it. He was ready to go to war against Mexico, but the Mexicans thought the price too high. Worse still, his support of one party increased the strength of the rival, and when he finally invaded Mexico, both parties agreed to notify him to take his army out of their country.

He was further embarrassed by his own contrary principle, not to interfere in the internal affairs of another nation. He discovered that the attempt "to help Mexico to save herself and serve her people" was hopeless. He fell into a state of despondency. If Mexico preferred anarchy to order, he would allow the Mexicans to stew in their own juice. He consoled himself by remembrance of the privilege he

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was at that moment according to Europe of settling her own affairs. "Have not the European nations," he asked, "taken as long as they wanted and spilled as much blood as they pleased in settling their affairs, and shall we deny that to Mexico because she is weak? No, I say." The answer is incontestable. He might have consoled himself further by the remembrance that he had not been asked to interfere either in Mexico or in Europe, and it was their own blood that was being shed.

But President Wilson, in his zeal "to help Mexico to save herself and serve her people," failed at the time to see what he afterwards learned, that those benighted people could not distinguish between "a war to serve mankind," "a war of service," and a "war of aggression." "We have gone down to Mexico," he said, "to serve mankind. We do not want to fight the Mexicans; we want to serve them." To the Mexicans it was all one. They applied to him their own fable of the goat eating the snake. The beast did not like the snake; he grinned while he eat, but he went on eating—for the good of the snake. As late as April 1928, a somewhat similar situation existed in Nicaragua, where 3700 Ameri-

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can Marines were debarked "to supervise the elections," whilst the voters of that dark country preferred to conduct their elections as elections are conducted in New York under the immemorial system of Tammany Hall.

Before the War, Colonel House had come to believe "that the legend of political isolation from Europe was the outworn remnant of an age that was past," and he desired an arrangement with the great European powers, which might preserve the peace of the world in which the United States had vital material interest. A prime requisite for this laudable purpose was conformity with the Imperial power of England. He went to London. He met Sir Edward Grey on July 3rd, 1913, and conceived for him an affection and respect, distinguished as he was by sincerity of purpose and honesty of method.<sup>35</sup> "A man that I am glad to know," said Grey of House. For a year Colonel House brooded over a vague plan to keep the peace of the world unbroken. Sir William Tyrrell, Secretary to Sir Edward Grey, who made a visit to Washington in November 1913, was the first to hear of it. The plan was an agreement between France, Germany, Eng-

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land, and the United States for a reduction of their armaments. Sir William suggested that House should make the proposal to the Kaiser first, which was sensible advice. The President was enthusiastic. If the Kaiser "proved complaisant, House would go to England." All that winter of 1913-14 he made a "study of current German psychology." From Benjamin Ide Wheeler at luncheon he learned much; "that the Kaiser and Roosevelt were much alike, save that the Kaiser had a religious turn of mind and is more cultured in his manners, a good listener and courteous in doing so." This mission, which he called the great adventure, was in hope "to pull the lever of common sense that might divert the nations of the old world from the track of war to that of peace. The stake was tremendous." <sup>36</sup> Sir Edward Grey had been tugging at that lever for three years.

Colonel House arrived in Berlin from London at the end of May 1914. He was not there long before he was writing to the President,<sup>37</sup> "The situation is extraordinary; it is militarism run stark mad. Unless some one acting for you can bring about a different understanding, there is some day to be an

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awful cataclysm. No one in Europe can do it." Nor in America either, as very soon appeared. Von Tirpitz, the Minister of Marine, evinced a dislike for the British that almost amounted to hatred; he doubted any success for House, as the English were not "reliable." He talked with the Kaiser in private for half an hour. He found that he had all the versatility of Roosevelt with something more of charm but something less of force; but he had a disagreeable habit of bringing his face very close to one when he talked most earnestly. House thought he never would get the Kaiser past his own hobbies, but finally he drew him to the subject he had come to discuss. The Empress, first by herself, then by her son, and finally by the Chamberlain, attempted to stop the conversation, and finally House, having said all he cared to say, and ready to leave, stopped talking and was very quiet, to indicate that he "at least was through."<sup>38</sup> In Paris discussion proved to be impossible, and yet with this meagre result of his mission to Germany and France he was satisfied, but "feeling that in London the soil will be more fallow." Sir Edward Grey had been preparing the European soil ever

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since he came into office, but it was yet a stony soil.

In London on his return he met many people and talked politics, such as any one might hear in a smoking-room or read in the magazines. The suggestion "that he, and Grey, and the Kaiser should meet at Kiel in some way, was not gone into further."<sup>39</sup> The Government had many preoccupations, the Irish mutiny, the feminist agitation, and finally on June 28th the murder in Serajevo; but Sir Edward Grey suggested that he should write to the Kaiser, which he himself could not do on account of French and Russian sensibility. He wrote a charming letter, urging "a sane and reasonable understanding among the statesmen of the Western peoples," but the Kaiser was away in Norwegian waters; the great adventure had ended in failure.

Colonel House returned home before war was declared. He still hoped that the assurances of British good feeling he had sent to the Kaiser might strengthen his peaceful inclinations, and that England and Germany might work for a pacific solution,<sup>40</sup> but he was disposed to blame the British Government for lack of quick action: "It was his pur-



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pose to go back to Germany and see the Emperor, but the conservative delay of Sir Edward and his confrères made that impossible." And yet, there was nothing to prevent his going. The world was soon at war. President Wilson made formal offer of mediation to the belligerents, and to his own people an appeal for neutrality, which Colonel House thought "one of the finest things he had ever done and sure of universal approbation."

An emotional wave swept over the United States. It soon subsided. Wilson kept his foothold. This revulsion of feeling is well observed in the mind of President Eliot of Harvard University. On August 6th, 1914, he wrote to Wilson suggesting "a combination of the British Empire, the United States, France, Japan, Italy, and Russia, to punish Austria and Germany for the outrages they are now committing and for the present protection of civilization against savagery." He inquires if "the people would not approve of the abandonment of Washington's advice to keep out of European complications," and recommends a blockade. He is careful to point out that "certain temporary commercial advantages would be gained by the blockading nations, a part

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of which might prove to be permanent," and suggests *pourparlers* by cable on this subject.<sup>41</sup>

The mood soon passed. He wrote again on August 20th, "that it would not be advisable to open *pourparlers* by cable on this subject. We apparently do not possess full information on the real purposes and objects of either Russia or Germany, and therefore cannot fix on Germany the chief responsibility. The extreme rashness of Germany's action cannot but suggest that elements of the situation still unknown to the rest of the world were known to her."<sup>42</sup> Besides, *pourparlers* would be secret, and all secrecy was bad. But President Eliot had a still more cogent reason for caution: "It seems probable that Russia, Great Britain, and France together can inflict ultimate defeat, the only tolerable result of this outrageous war. It seems possible that the seven nations now at war can give the much-needed demonstration. If seven nations can give this demonstration, the other nations had better keep out of the conflict." He remained of opinion, however, "that in the interests of civilization and peace neither Germany nor Austria should be allowed to succeed." At a later time, Woodrow Wilson likened Germany

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to a madman who should be curbed; and Colonel House suggested to him in his own mild way, that possibly the United States might be expected to take some part in the curbing of the madman, in addition to giving the cool and unimpassioned advice that he should be curbed. The seven nations of Europe were doing their best. Theodore Roosevelt also restrained his natural ardour for war. In the *Outlook* of September 23rd, 1914, he wrote, "Our country stands well-nigh alone among the great civilized Powers in being unshaken by the present world-wide war. For this we should be humbly and profoundly grateful. It is certainly eminently desirable that we should remain entirely neutral."<sup>43</sup> Even Ambassador Page, on August 28th, was writing to Colonel House, "What a *magnificent* spectacle our country presents; we escape murder, we escape brutalization; we will have to settle it; we gain in every way."

Colonel House was in England again on February 7th, 1915. The War had been in progress for six months. His mission on this occasion was to end the War "upon a basis of evacuation of Belgium and drastic disarmament which might ensure permanent

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peace.”<sup>44</sup> The German Ambassador in Washington, Bernstorff, thought there would be no obstacle, and a reply had come from the British “that was not entirely unequivocal.” With this rather meagre assurance, the President was much elated, and Colonel House prepared to leave on the following Saturday, it being thought they “could button-up South American matters” before he left so as to leave him free. Truly, he was a burden-bearer. As the editor so justly observes, “he was carrying on a three-ring circus of negotiation.”<sup>45</sup>

Mr. Bryan was appeased; he had planned to go himself as peace emissary. The President prepared a letter of instructions, and “said he would write it himself on his little typewriter, so that not even his confidential stenographer would know of it.” Diplomacy, after all, must be secret. They arranged in the event of a peace conference, that Mr. Wilson should preside if he were invited. The one obstacle in the way of speed towards this great end was Sir Edward Grey’s practice of leaving town from Saturday to Monday, but it was surmised he would forgo his week-end. House thought so radical an interference with this routine was unnecessary, “as his boat

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would probably not get in Saturday, and Monday would be time enough.”<sup>46</sup> Accordingly, a cable was sent to Sir Edward, that he ask House to lunch on Monday. As the time came for saying “good-bye, the President’s eyes were moist; he insisted upon going to the station; he got out of the car, walked to the ticket office, and then to the train itself.” Well might House conclude, “It is a joy to work for such an appreciative friend.”

The day after his arrival in London, February 8th, 1915, Colonel House had four hours’ talk and luncheon with Sir Edward Grey. He gave him Mr. Wilson’s book, he writes to the author, “which pleased him, and he regretted the only thing he could give you in return was a book he had written on angling.”<sup>47</sup> Sir Edward Grey won his whole heart: “I put questions to him with great rapidity; he answered with the utmost candour, telling the whole story as he would to a member of his own Government. If every belligerent nation had a Sir Edward Grey at the head of its affairs, there would be no war.” On the day of his arrival, House took tea with the editorial writers of the *Times*, and dined with the managing editor at night.

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Next day, Colonel House had luncheon with the American Ambassador, Walter H. Page, to meet Sir Edward Grey and Sir William Tyrrell, where "Grey and I did practically all the talking"; but Sir Edward must have been bewildered by the pronouncement that the United States could not be a party to the making of peace, since "it was not only the unwritten law of our Country but also our fixed policy, not to become involved in European affairs." The utmost Colonel House would concede was that the belligerents should first make peace, and then his "Government would be willing to join all nations in setting forth clearly the rights of belligerents in future."<sup>48</sup> One of the prohibitions to which he thought the Americans might agree after the War was over and peace made, was "the violation of neutral territory." At the moment, unfortunately, Sir Edward was more concerned with the present violation and completing the present war than in establishing the rules under which future wars should be fought.

A letter arrived from Zimmermann, German Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, and at the time Acting Secretary, whilst von Jagow, the



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Minister, was absent on his "honeymoon." The suggestion from House, he writes, "of paying an indemnity to Belgium seems hardly feasible to me," although he would be most happy to see him. With Grey he discussed this letter long and carefully, and it brought high hope to Colonel House. "I thought," he said to Grey, "it was up to him and me to decide when to begin negotiations for peace." They "sat by the fire in his library, facing one another, with a single mind and purpose" House was hot for going to Germany at once: Grey rather thought he would be more certain of his ground after "von Hindenburg and the other military men had tried out their different campaigns." Apart from this discrepancy of opinion, the two statesmen were in entire accord. To Grey's proposal that after the War he would retire for a year's rest, House advised retiring permanently; "to do anything else afterwards would be like a great artist going out in his back-yard and painting the fence." Grey "looked at me wide-eyed and serious."

Colonel House was seeing Sir Edward Grey continually, alone and in company with Mr. Asquith, Lord Kitchener, Lord Bryce, and other important

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persons. Finally, he was in private audience with the King, who talked more of war than of peace. In three weeks he saw almost every Liberal of importance in England, and then devoted a week to the Conservatives. To A. J. Balfour he took an instant liking, and had a sincere desire that it should be reciprocated. Curiously enough in such company, he did "most of the talking." Mr. Balfour reminded him of Wilson. But of all it was Sir Edward Grey he liked best and trusted most. He showed him his correspondence with the various American Ambassadors and with the Germans, and took his advice before making reply. In this mood he left London, "appreciative of Grey's honesty and moderation, fearful of the demands of France, suspicious of German sincerity." The quest for peace revealed "nothing but unwillingness of any of the belligerents to yield one iota of their aspirations," and on March 11th, 1915, House left London for Paris and Berlin.

In Paris the utmost he received was an expression of interest in seeing him on his return from Berlin; but he was convinced that the French wanted so many things that peace was not in sight. "If it is brought about," he concludes, "it will be

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through the sanity and justice of Sir Edward Grey and British opinion.”<sup>49</sup> He did, however, entrust to one Willard Straight, the task of conveying through Casenave and Margerie, “to Delcassé the thought, that it will be of advantage to the Allies to have the goodwill of the President and that the best way to get it was through me.” Another idea he wished to convey was, “that the really essential thing was to strive for a permanent settlement and not for any small territorial advantage.” But these Frenchmen had thoughts and ideas of their own about Alsace Lorraine.

Within a week, Colonel House proceeded to Berlin, where he did his best “to get every one to soften down through the press and create a better feeling”; but Zimmermann told him the Germans had no intention of softening, “and that any possible peace parleys would mean the overthrow of the Government and the Kaiser.” There was nothing “that even looks like peace in sight.” Within a week he was writing to the President, “I leave sadly disappointed that we were misled into believing that peace parleys might be begun.” He was prone to over-“estimate the effect of flattery upon Euro-

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peans; they value such things far beyond our comprehension.”<sup>50</sup> That also is doubtful. Again he wrote that his visit to Berlin “was exceedingly trying and disagreeable in many ways.” The manner of those with whom he talked was offensive; “upon the streets one hesitated to speak in English for fear of being insulted.” On his return to Paris he was quite unprepared for the warmth with which Poincaré welcomed him, although he found Wilson’s purposes badly misunderstood in France.

Before May 1st, 1915, Colonel House was in London again, where “he at once renewed his intimacy with British friends, and created new contacts of interest and importance.” From Lord Northcliffe and another journalist he heard “the most profound secrets of the army and in a way that makes me shiver.” Lord Kitchener he thought forceful and able, fair and impartial in his reply to the pointed question House put to him, “as to the benefit it would be to the Allies if the United States came in on their side.” He read to Mr. Balfour the cablegram he had sent to the President about the sinking of the *Lusitania*, which he complimented warmly.

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It contained the words: "Our intervention will save, rather than increase the loss of life. America has come to the parting of the ways. We can no longer remain neutral spectators. We are being weighed in the balance, and our position amongst nations is being assessed by mankind."

Of his interview with Lord Haldane Colonel House writes, "By common consent we dined alone. He showed me the diary he kept during the memorable visit to Berlin. I took it as an indication of his confidence that he let me see this. He explained everything. He gave me two of his books. I mentioned my proposal as to the Freedom of the Seas. He thought it splendid."<sup>51</sup> He was especially pleased with Mr. Lloyd George; he reminded him of the virile American aggressive type of politician, full of energy and enthusiasm, with something dynamic in him. He assured Mr. Reginald McKenna, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, that, unless they modified their embargo policy, the Americans would hold them to a strict accountability. He entirely agreed. They also agreed upon measures to be taken "in the event we came into the War on the side of the Allies." To Lord Lansdowne he was

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equally frank, and warned him that the President was "a Scotchman with all the tenacity of that race." To Lord Crewe he read the President's dispatches to him about the blockade, asking for a reply; but he made the sagacious suggestion that the English should have the reply ready, and he would advise the President not to ask for it, until the German submarine controversy was settled. If it were settled by war, obviously there would be no need of an answer.

On May 7th, Colonel House had an audience of the King: "We fell to talking, strangely enough, of the probability of Germany sinking a transatlantic liner. He said, 'Suppose they should sink the *Lusitania* with American passengers on board.' " <sup>52</sup> House liked the King. At a later audience he read to him one or two cables, and showed him a cartoon from an American paper. His final judgment is, "The more I see of the King the better I like him; he is a good fellow and deserves a better fate than being a king"—that is, of England, without the power of an American President. The answer to His Majesty's supposition came the night of the first audience. As Colonel House was dining at



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the American Embassy a dispatch came in that the *Lusitania* had been sunk.

Colonel House left London for home with the conviction that war between Germany and the United States was inevitable.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, he formulated the suggestions he intended to make for the provision of munitions and war material once he had persuaded the President "to put all the strength, all the virility and all the energy of our nation into it, so that Europe might remember for a century what it meant to provoke a peaceful nation into war."<sup>54</sup>

At the Cabinet meeting in Washington, May 11th, 1915, at which the President presented the note he proposed to send to Germany, that is, the "*Lusitania* note" about which Ambassador Page telegraphed to the President, "May I be allowed to express my personal congratulations," adding that "most of the members of the British Government as well as Lansdowne, Balfour, and Bonar Law gave private expressions of praise," and read the cable from Colonel House of two days earlier, Mr. Bryan "sensed" the atmosphere in which Colonel House had been moving. "He showed some heat

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and said there were some members of the Cabinet who were not neutral.”<sup>55</sup> It was then that “the President turned to him and said with a steely glitter in his eyes, ‘Mr. Bryan, you are not warranted in making such an assertion. We all doubtless have our opinions, but there are none of us who can justly be accused of being unfair.’” That was the last meeting Mr. Bryan attended. He resigned. His contention was that the dispute with Germany over the *Lusitania* should be submitted to arbitration, and that Americans should safeguard themselves by refusing to travel on belligerent ships or on those carrying munitions of war.

Colonel House returned to America on June 13th, 1915, with his mission unfulfilled. That mission was a lofty one. It began with the proposal for a convention of neutrals and belligerents “which should lay down the principles upon which civilized warfare should in the future be conducted.” The suggestion emanating from Sir Edward Grey, that the United States “should enter into some general guaranty for world-wide peace,” he “evaded.”<sup>56</sup> The belligerents must first make peace amongst themselves. In time he took a less remote view, and had

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a vision of two conventions operating at the same moment, the original one dealing with future wars to be called and presided over by Mr. Wilson, and the lesser one of the belligerents which would concern itself merely with present peace. But even "if peace is not in sight by August," 1915, Wilson could call his own convention, "and it might be used as a medium of bringing peace."

But Colonel House does not suggest how this peace conference was to be arranged, or who was to preside over it. He had in mind the State and National Conventions in the United States, which were so easily called and so easily controlled. He saw "no insuperable objections to peace; if the belligerents would begin to talk, they might soon come to an agreement." "If only you, Grey, and Berlin were within talking distance," he wrote to Wilson, "much could be accomplished."<sup>57</sup> Indeed, he enlightened Sir Edward Grey upon the procedure to be followed: "I explained my methods of organization in political conventions in the past; that while they were seemingly spontaneous, as a matter of fact nothing was left to chance. While measures were apparently drawn by different delegations, in

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the end it was found they fitted into the platform like a mosaic. I showed why no opposition could withstand such thorough organization.”<sup>58</sup> But certain events had happened in Europe, the sinking of the *Lusitania*, the British embargo, the use of poisonous gas. “If these things had not happened,” he writes to Wilson in despair, “I could have gone along, and by midsummer we would have had the belligerents discussing, through you, the peace terms.”<sup>59</sup> But these things did happen.

The charge his fellow-citizens have against Colonel House is that, whilst he considered war inevitable, he was aiding Wilson in his second election on the sole issue that there should be no war. The fault is explicable. When he thought of war, he did not mean physical war. He meant the silent moral and economic power of the United States in array against the enemy, beholding which, the legions of Europe would run backward and fall down dead. The war the President contemplated was his omnific word stilling the European anarchy. But the Germans were not frightened. Real war then became inevitable.

### III

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ON January 5th, 1916, Colonel House arrived in England on his fourth mission, which was nothing less than "a way of salvation from the German threat and a means of enforcing a stable peace."<sup>60</sup> Wilson "prayed God it might succeed." The original suggestion had come from Sir Edward Grey in two letters dated August 26th and September 22nd, 1915, in which the term "League of Nations" is employed.<sup>61</sup> It must be admitted that for one going upon a mission subject to the divine blessing, Colonel House was not quite frank with the Germans. The American aims coincided with the public war aims of the Allies; it was the President's purpose to intervene and stop this destructive war; House would not, of course, let Berlin know of any understanding with the Allies; he would rather lead them to think the proposal would be rejected

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by the Allies; this might induce Berlin to accept the proposal.<sup>62</sup> Sir Edward Grey did not show much warmth over this handsome proposal, "which was practically to secure victory to the Allies"; he had not even discussed it with them; they must have a more definite offer; they would be suspicious of any Peace Conference; they must know exactly what the proposal meant, and be assured that the United States was prepared to intervene if they accepted it.<sup>63</sup>

"These are slow-moving people, the British, and when I told them it was a question of hours rather than days, I saw it was hopeless," he was compelled to confess after three weeks in London on his first quest.<sup>64</sup> Yet he saw that the delay was "inevitable no matter how fast they wished to move, for the reason that they cannot act alone." After a year, he was more convinced that "the British are in many ways dull."<sup>65</sup> He reminded the President how impossible it was to do things quickly in London; matters that they two would settle in a day occupied a week or perhaps two; he asked him to remember the slowness of the British mind; they had been a year and a half getting thoroughly awak-



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ened. But there were other causes than native slowness, to which Colonel House was blind.

Coming fresh from the absolute domain of the American President, Colonel House was bewildered by the democratic institutions he encountered in Europe. Even in Germany there was no single irresponsible person with whom he could deal. Bismarck was fallen more than twenty years, and in his place had arisen a system of which no one could discover where the centre lay. In France the President was compelled to operate through ministers who were responsible to a legislature which only allowed them to hold office on sufferance. But it was in England he was most bewildered. He could talk with Sir Edward Grey, A. J. Balfour, innumerable other voluntary hosts, and even with the Premier himself; but he could get no swift action, as there was a Cabinet that must be consulted and two Houses of Parliament that must be convinced. When he finally gained access to the King his bewilderment was complete. The King himself was merely part of a system which the English had devised during a process of a thousand years for their own government. But Colonel House is too hard on

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the English for the slowness of their system; they had made trial of an independent executive, and fought three civil wars to rid themselves of it. Nor does he appear to have discovered that every Minister had his own Colonel House, known to the Constitution as permanent under-secretary, and these Colonel Houses were conferring continually during their whole lifetime, informally it might be at a club, over a tea-table, in a country house, during a walk in the woods. The whole range of domestic and foreign affairs was under their keen and experienced eyes.

Their own system of government was quite adequate for the United States, which is merely a large municipality, the various States, cities, and towns having their own arrangements. All the people ask is that the Federal power leave them alone; and they experience a sense of relief when congressmen and representatives disperse from Washington to their homes. The various departments operate well enough without a responsible head. The post-office carries letters; pensions are paid; the customs wages war against boot-leggers, smugglers, and immigrants; the revenue collects itself through the tar-

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iff; political aspirants for office are compelled to wait; foreign affairs in normal times are negligible.

Under such a system the British Empire would fall asunder in a day. The Prime Minister has no existence apart from his Cabinet; a member on appointment must be re-elected by the people, which is a neat device for allowing them to express their opinion of the Government itself. Not since the days of James II has the King exercised the personal rule of the American President. The English do not like that kind of monarchy.<sup>66</sup> Their foreign affairs are so vast and complicated, they must have a special office and experienced ambassadors to carry them on. When the United States in 1914 extended their operations beyond their own borders, and took upon themselves the good of humanity as a whole they found the need of some such institution, and that institution was Colonel House.

But when he went to England, he missed the speed and simplicity of the Washington system. He was astonished at "the slowness of the English." The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary must consult the Cabinet; and the Cabinet must make a sure estimate of the opinion of two Houses of Par-

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liament. Even the King must take advice, and France could not be treated as a South American republic. He longed for "a Palmerston, Chatham, or Bismarck,"<sup>67</sup> or, one might add, a Wilson. In Washington, on Cabinet day, it was the Colonel's habit "to meet the different members as they came in, for there was something he had to say to each" (I. 138). Two members came to see him, and through them he warned all members against making speeches, unless the President had something in particular for them to say, as the occasion demanded. When he found there was some feeling amongst the members because the Cabinet meetings had been entirely discontinued, he agreed to mention it to the President and ask him to resume them.<sup>68</sup> That was precisely the subject the English were compelled to mention to Charles I. Finally, Colonel House began to hold his own Cabinet meetings.<sup>69</sup> This period of activity lasted from November 1913, until he went to Europe, and nothing was too small for his supervision; the Secretary of the Interior thought it necessary to take advice upon his acceptance of an honorary degree from a university. From one meeting Mr. Bryan followed him

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“all the way to the automobile, bareheaded in the cold bleak wind, to get in as much as he could upon ‘the best way to do up’ a Senator.” It is little wonder Colonel House found European methods clumsy.

The two main subjects of this fourth mission to England were the British blockade and the freedom of the seas. The English, for an intelligent people, it must be admitted, were painfully slow in comprehending what Mr. Wilson meant by the freedom of the seas; but they were quick enough to explain to him that, so far as they were concerned, the seas were always free—in time of peace. They could not answer for the Germans in the event of their victory. Colonel House believed that this English ignorance was merely assumed; he had explained the matter to Sir Edward Grey and to every member of the British Cabinet whom he could reach. The matter first came up on February 16th, 1915, during his previous mission at a luncheon “freighted with importance,” the American Ambassador, W. H. Page, and Sir William Tyrrell also being present. In the covenant which was to govern future wars, Colonel House “suggested the setting forth of cer-

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tain lanes of safety at sea in order that shipping of all countries, both belligerent and neutral, would not be subject to attack." Sir Edward Grey went further, and amended this suggestion by saying he thought Great Britain would be willing to dispense with lanes, and agree that all merchant shipping of whatever nature, belligerent or neutral, would be immune." <sup>70</sup>

This unexpected doctrine of the absolute freedom of the sea even in time of war was a delight and astonishment to Colonel House, for he considered Sir Edward Grey the "one sane big figure" in England, probably the dominating personality in the final settlement. "It is my purpose," he writes to the President, "to keep this 'up my sleeve' and when I go to Germany, use it to bring favourable opinion to you by intimating that I believe, when the end comes, you will insist upon this being done; in other words, that with your initiative and with Germany's co-operation, Great Britain can be induced to make these terms." <sup>71</sup>

But Colonel House over-estimated the simplicity of the Germans. They were not entirely ignorant of this proposal which House had "up his sleeve."



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The term *mare liberum* was as old as Grotius; it was used in the French Revolution as a statement of foreign policy. At the Second Hague Conference in 1907, England was "prepared to abandon the principle of contraband in case of war; the right of visit would be exercised only in order to ascertain the neutral character of the merchantmen." At the same Conference the United States advocated the exemption from capture of belligerent private property. These instructions as formulated by Elihu Root, the Secretary of State, were repeated by Ambassador Choate in the phrase, "immunity of private property at sea."

The advantages that would accrue to England from such a policy were dimly suspected by Germany at the time, although they did not catalogue them with the admirable perspicacity of Colonel House and the editor of his papers: <sup>72</sup> "The disadvantages of her island position would largely disappear, her food supply would be secure, and her commerce with the far-flung portions of the Empire assured without the protection of a costly fleet. Submarines would not be able to prey upon merchant shipping. The Power with the most colonies

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and the widest overseas trade stood to gain the most.”

Colonel House found no difficulty in gaining adherents to this doctrine. “Lord Loreburn,” he wrote to President Wilson, May 3rd, 1915, “thought it would be worth 100 per cent. to other nations and 120 per cent. to England, though we would have great difficulty in getting the English mind to see this; he thought Balfour’s mind was too feminine to grasp the significance of such a measure; he advised that I see Bonar Law, who, he said, had an inferior mind but was practical; he said if we could incorporate this idea into the peace convention, it would not only be a great act of statesmanship, but it would be perhaps the greatest jest that was ever perpetrated upon an unsuspecting nation, having of course Germany in mind. I told him I shivered in Berlin when I proposed it to the Chancellor and the Foreign Office, for fear they would see it was more to England’s advantage than their own.” <sup>73</sup>

Of course Colonel House “was careful not to whisper in Berlin that he believed the British would win the lion’s share”; but if he could assure the Germans of British consent, they would then be con-

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vinced that "Belgium was no longer needed as a base for German naval activity, since England was being brought to terms." Peace would come at once and disarmament follow. Again his diplomacy failed. "Unfortunately the Germans did not possess the necessary tact and discretion; they lost no time in advertising the idea as their own, and thereby ruined all chance of success."<sup>74</sup> That is precisely what they wished to do. They announced that, if England granted the freedom of the seas, Germany would retire from Belgium. If England refused, Germany would establish a permanent fortified base on the English Channel. They would have justified themselves and put England in the wrong.

But it was not an "unreasoning prejudice" that now held England back in the stress of war. They reasoned that more reliance was to be placed upon their own Navy than upon a phrase which the Americans had made their own without any power to enforce it. They remembered the case of Belgium, which was protected by a formal treaty signed by powerful sponsors of whom Germany herself was one. In any case, Colonel House was dealing with the conduct of future wars. The British Navy in

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time of actual war preferred to follow the advice of Nelson to his captains before Trafalgar: In case of doubt you will not be wrong in laying alongside the enemy.

To Colonel House "the great irony of the War was that his proposal was so eagerly swallowed by the Germans, so scornfully refused by British opinion." He should not have been ironical at the expense of the English. For four hundred years their Navy had served them well; in this great day they were unwilling to exchange it for a plan "kept up the sleeve" even of a friend so devoted as Colonel House. Besides, John Bull, amiable old gentleman as he is when ashore, like Drake and Nelson who were amiable fools when they were ashore, is capable like them, as John Macnaughten said, of a most devastating kick when he pulls his sea-boots on.

But Colonel House continued on his hopeless quest. He "evaded all decisive conversations" in Paris, and proceeded to Berlin, where he arrived on January 26th, 1916. In Germany the condition was hopeless. With von Bethmann-Hollweg, the Chancellor, he could agree upon nothing, not even

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upon the quality of Sir Edward Grey, the stubbornness of England, submarine warfare, or the violation of Belgium. The Chancellor was drinking copiously of beer, but the guest, content with mineral water, matched him glass for glass; yet the beer did not affect him, for his brain was as befuddled at the beginning as it was at the end. With von Jagow the results were little better. He recited to him the misconduct of Germany, but could secure no promise of amendment. He grew weary, and went to bed with the feeling that not much had been accomplished.<sup>75</sup>

Before Colonel House left London he had obtained from Sir Edward Grey a written memorandum of the agreement at which they had arrived. It embodied "the plan" which he had brought to Europe, "that a conference should be summoned to put an end to the War. It would secure peace on terms not unfavourable to the Allies; and, if it failed to secure peace, the United States would leave the Conference as a belligerent on the side of the Allies." But Grey made it clear that he must inform the Prime Minister and his colleagues, and in no circumstances could the British Government ac-

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cept or make any proposal except in consultation and agreement with the Allies. When this agreement was submitted to the President, he inserted the word "probably" at the crucial point.<sup>76</sup>

"Probably leave the Conference as a belligerent" was a frail reliance for the Allies. They were charmed by the amiable and honest emissary; but they could not fail to remind themselves that he was entirely an unofficial person with power neither to bind nor to loose, that his status depended upon the mind or whim of the President of whom they knew little, and that relation might be dissolved by his removal by natural or violent death. Indeed, within the memory of persons then living, three presidents had been assassinated, and one other had narrowly escaped. Finally, they were not convinced of the power of the President to compel his people to join in the war. He did fail to compel them to join in the peace. Even Colonel House himself was conscious of this disability. He asked that the Lord Chief Justice be sent to America in case of need, "as a precautionary measure and for my own protection; the President might agree, then something might arise to cause him to change his mind." But



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once again Germany put an end to this diplomacy by renewal of the submarine campaign.

Colonel House had as little faith in ambassadors as he had in Cabinet Ministers. The stupidity of both was his constant wonder. When he "falls to philosophizing," as he so often does, he arrives at admirable conclusions from premisses that have no existence outside of his own mind. From his premiss, <sup>77</sup> "It has been thought entirely legitimate to lie, deceive, and be cruel in the name of patriotism," he deduced a theory of international morals, that public affairs should be conducted as private business, and nations should deal with one another as individuals in private life. <sup>78</sup> It would be a reasonable question to put to him, if ever in his own distinguished career, he encountered an ambassador, diplomat, foreign secretary, or minister who attempted those arts in Washington, London, Paris, or even in Berlin. They might be stupid, sulky, slow, but not to one does he ascribe falsity, deceit, or cruelty. His highest praise goes to Sir Edward Grey and Bernstorff. Indeed, in the whole book, there is only one example of the method he deprecates, and that was practised by himself when he made the futile attempt to be-

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guile the Germans into the belief that they would get the better of England in a bargain he proposed over the freedom of the seas.

And, after all, was Colonel House so innocent of business methods in the United States—tariffs, combines, trusts, frauds, incited strikes, and contrived bankruptcies—as to propose those methods in the issues of national life and death? If he narrowed his prescription to the relation of private individuals, Woodrow Wilson could enlighten him upon the conduct of his colleagues and trustees in Princeton University, which ever afterwards was “a nightmare” to him, in those terrible days, which he said had sunk deep into his soul. Emerging from those trials, Wilson thought he had nothing to learn of public life, even in the United States.

Every one is agreed that, if Colonel House had succeeded in his first missions by persuading the nations of Europe to disarm and settle all their disputes in a conference presided over by the President of the United States, there would have been no war. President Wilson believed that if the War had been delayed a little longer, it could never have happened, “because the nations would have gotten to-

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gether.”<sup>79</sup> The German Kaiser from his seclusion in Doorn is reported to have confirmed this opinion.<sup>80</sup> But the “awful cataclysm” was not prevented; and it is a legitimate matter for speculation in how far this intrusion of President Wilson’s plenipotentiary precipitated the disaster. Sir Cecil Spring-Rice developed this thesis to Colonel House himself.<sup>81</sup> “You came so near making a general war impossible, that the war party in Berlin and Vienna became alarmed. They took advantage of the Archduke’s murder and the Kaiser’s absence to precipitate matters.” It is sometimes best to let sleeping dogs lie.

Sir Cecil Spring-Rice, on the evidence of House himself, had none of those imaginary diplomatic wiles. For that very reason he was not “popular” in Washington; he was antipathetic to Mr. Bryan and to Colonel House himself. There is an account of an extremely unpleasant incident between the two.<sup>82</sup> The subject was the American protest against the British blockade. “No matter,” he said, “how low our fortunes run, we will go to war before we admit the principle as your Government wishes to interpret it.” When House mentioned Bernstorff’s

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name, it was the day after the Zeppelin raid on London, Sir Cecil fell into "a fine rage." House lost his temper. He denied that Sir Cecil "represented either his Chief or his government." And yet Colonel House was soon to receive a letter from Sir Edward Grey, from which it would appear that Sir Cecil very accurately represented his Chief: "It looks as if the United States might now strike the weapon of sea power out of our hands, and thereby ensure a German victory." <sup>83</sup> But that weapon was not to be tamely surrendered, and the British Navy was compelled to consider the possibility of war with the United States. That is the meaning of Admiral Jellicoe's cryptic utterance in May, 1916, "The Grand Fleet might later be called upon to confront a situation of much wider scope." <sup>84</sup>

"When the Ambassador saw the length to which I was prepared to go in severing relations with him, he became apologetic, and asked me to forgive him," House records. In London, he asked advice from Lord Bryce upon the difficulties with Sir Cecil; but "he thought it would be exceedingly unwise for me to take the matter up here." A year later he returns to the subject of Spring-Rice. He thinks

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he should have been recalled.<sup>85</sup> He himself had superseded all American Ambassadors, but "Grey failed to see that conditions demanded radical changes, and that the ordinary diplomatic corps was unequal to the new situation brought about by the War."

Colonel House might have reminded himself, that the term "severing relations" is an official term, that the British Ambassador was not accredited to him, and that it is always unwise to record a private conversation damaging to the other person. In the nature of the case there can be no corroborative evidence, and in this case the other person is dead. For Sir Cecil was a great Englishman, and served his country well. He, too, was an idealist. The last night he spent in the British Embassy in Washington, which was only a month before his death, he wrote:

I vow to thee, my country—all earthly things above—  
Entire and whole and perfect, the service of my love;  
The love that never falters, the love that pays the price;  
The love that makes undaunted the final sacrifice.  
And there's another country, I've heard of long ago,  
Most dear to them that love her, most great to them that  
know;

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We may not count her armies; we may not see her King;  
Her fortress is a faithful heart, her pride is suffering.

Colonel House was not callous or cruel, and if he lacked in sympathy, that was because he had not suffered. European statesmen with whom he talked had been living for years in subconscious expectation of the fatal telegram. War does not really brutalize. Even at the Front, staff officers of middle age would contrive to conceal their anxiety after a heavy action, and with a sense of pride refrain from inquiring of an advanced post, Is it well with the child? It was hard for such men to accept with full submission the counsel Colonel House gave to Sir Cecil Spring-Rice, "that he should be able to look at public affairs quite apart from his private interests." This suave, adroit, detached, impersonal American did not clearly distinguish between the man who has the boil and the man who is squeezing it.

And Colonel House was something less than just to the English, French, and Germans as nations. They could not look upon the European situation with his austere detachment. When nations are fighting for their lives, they are incapable of abstract thought. War to him was a stupid and sense-



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less occupation in which only madmen could engage. It was merely an extension of those Texan feuds which happily in his own lifetime had become extinct. He does not record a single conversation with any fighting man. In his peregrinations through Europe he was not led even by a sense of curiosity to look upon the war. Once he heard the sounds of guns as he passed within twelve miles of Verdun, but the blinds of his train were drawn down, and he saw nothing.

He was continually astonished at the helplessness of the various civil governments to stop the War. Even his friend, Sir Edward Grey, he thought, would have been hanged, had he suggested an untimely and inconclusive end. With his capacity of reasoning from small things to great, if he had only surmised the probable experience of a well-meaning spectator who should attempt to arrest the progress of an American base-ball game, or to interfere in a single combat at Madison Square Garden for a much lesser prize than life, he would not have been so impatient of Europe. He might have reflected, too, that so simple a power as a horse in full career, a locomotive engine, or a ship at full speed, cannot be

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suddenly stopped, much less reversed, without disaster. War has a terrible spirit and a frightful inertia that force it to the appointed end. To the armies any civilian who attempted to hold them back became a worse enemy than the enemy with whom they were engaged. Their word for him was traitor.

His next complaint is secrecy, and yet no one could be more secretive than he was. He did not fully appreciate how vast and delicate a fabric an Empire is, nor the completeness of intelligence demanded for its support. This intelligence must be secret, and the essence of a diplomatic service is the secrecy of it. He was not informed that there were in operation in England not only one but three services, each one secret in itself and all three secret the one from the other, culminating alone in one single mind. Otherwise, the Admiralty could not have been informed fifteen hours in advance, that the German fleet was about to emerge for the battle of Jutland, nor could the Americans themselves have been supplied with the instructions sent by the German Government to their Minister in Mexico, in which the United States was vitally concerned. Much is made in the book of the Foreign Office

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code given to Colonel House; but it is not explained to the public that the code was useless except for transmitting his own messages and deciphering only those he received in return.

Strange as it may seem, there is little in these Intimate Papers of a diplomatic nature that has not already been fully disclosed by accredited persons. Of military value there is nothing, although at times Colonel House does bring his native wisdom to bear upon strategy. To Sir Edward Grey he "urged better co-ordination between the Eastern and Western Fronts." It seemed to him "perfect folly not to work more in harmony"; and he explained that "when the Germans are attacking in the east, they should be severely pressed in the west, and *vice versa*." <sup>86</sup> One would think he had been attending the lectures on strategy which were being given by the Chief of the British Imperial General-staff. Upon general policy he makes one or two shrewd observations. Before the War he was not blind to the danger for the United States by England and Germany coming to a naval agreement and "these two getting too close." <sup>87</sup> Early in 1915 he wrote, "If this war lasts six months longer, England will

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have a navy that will be more than equal to the combined navies of the world; that is something for us Americans to think of.”<sup>88</sup>

The pacificists in every country are well-meaning people—women, old men, and young men who have in their nature something of both. When war does come, many of them are the worst belligerents of all, but do not abandon their pacificism. They urge the young to fight to carry out their theory, of going to war to end war; but by their pacificism they have sent forth the young without weapons in their hands. By a combination of truculence and cowardice they arrive at the conclusion that a nation can fight and not fight at the same time. Both House and Wilson were at first under the delusion that the mere existence of a military force precludes the necessity for using it. It was important, of course, that the moral influence of America should be based on a strong army and navy, but they thought it possible that by a mere threat they could compel the belligerents to stop fighting.<sup>89</sup> Up to the very end of neutrality, “Wilson believed that the swiftest and most effective step was a frank demand by the American Government that the War must stop

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in deference to the necessities and welfare of mankind. He was confident that such a demand, backed by the moral influence of the United States, would lead to negotiations." Colonel House recognized much earlier the folly of making futile demands unless they were backed by force. As recently as 1925, in a private letter he reiterated that opinion: "Our big mistake was that we were not in a position to intervene in spite of Allied or German protests."<sup>90</sup> The German Government was of like opinion with him: "they promised their people that long before America could render effective aid the submarine would have starved the British out."

Any reader who accompanies Colonel House through these thousand pages will come under the continual influence of his charm. He moves through those years of tragedy with a naïve innocence, a simplicity, and wonder, such as a familiar English artist affects upon the comic screen. In American society, the term "Uncle" is applied as a mark of endearment to one who combines in himself the graces of simplicity, wisdom, and benevolence. Colonel House was like Mr. Thornton Wilder's *Uncle Pio*. He had the desire to be varied, secret, and om-

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niscient; willing to renounce the dignities of public life, if in secret he might look down upon men, knowing more about them than they knew about themselves, with a knowledge that occasionally passed into action and made of him an agent in the affairs of state and of great persons.

But, after all, it is easy to be good when one lives life on one's own terms. Colonel House was a spectator of life, an interested amateur. He was a giver of advice, with no responsibility for the decision that might arise from it. If his advice was not taken, he was free to shrug his shoulders and walk away. He never pressed his opinions upon the President, and equally he never presumed to forecast the decision he might take. Approaching any problem in a selfless spirit, undeflected by personal motives, it was easy to be wise. That was the source of his power, as Mr. E. S. Martin explained at the time—the confidence men had in his sagacity and unselfishness. For that reason he was consulted freely by politicians and president, in the sure belief that he would faithfully represent any given case to either party, and that any advice he might give was disinterested and sincere. Indeed, he was not con-



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cerned about the reception of his advice once it was given. His mind then was free.

But in the later days, his hand became subdued to the medium in which he worked. He developed qualities which in a politician he himself would have suspected as hypocrisy, and in a diplomat as deceit. To Sir Edward Grey he promised American intervention, oblivious of President, Congress, or People. As early as May 9th, 1915, he had sent to the President "a carefully pondered cable: We can no longer remain neutral spectators."<sup>91</sup> On June 16th, he thinks "we shall find ourselves drifting into war with Germany."<sup>92</sup> On August 22nd he favoured severing relations, "although he believed it meant war."<sup>93</sup> As late as June 1916, he was convinced "ultimate co-operation to be inevitable";<sup>94</sup> and yet he concealed from himself and the people the real meaning of war.

After these Papers, there is nothing now, hid of Woodrow Wilson's character, and nothing ignoble has been disclosed in his public or domestic life. There is a continuous description of that domestic life in the White House which won the approval of the American people. It was simple yet dignified.

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He rose early, and at ten o'clock, as one said, like every American father, having wound the clock, put out the cat and the politicians, he went quietly to bed. He read aloud books, which on the authority of Colonel House were good books—Wordsworth, Matthew Arnold, Keats, Gray, Watson, Burke, Bagehot, even his own, and *Punch*—"while there were no laughs in it, it was full of smiles." He was well and carefully dressed. His fireside companions were his family and Colonel House; he was tender, affectionate, and considerate. It was all so different in Roosevelt's time, when the White House was filled with explorers, travellers, big-game hunters, and prize-fighters. With the American passion for words, a phrase will win, or lose, an election. An incautious opponent of Wilson in derision ascribed to him "the austere truthfulness of the schoolmaster." The phrase won for him the votes of the 40,000 school teachers in Texas, and the approbation, if not all the votes, of every school teacher in the United States. For there was in the phrase something pungently true, Wilson was austere; he was truthful; and he was the schoolmaster until the very end.

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Every great man lives and moves within the orbit of his own mind, but he must be very great to endure the lonely solitude of that secret cell. Woodrow Wilson was a lonely man, but he was not great enough to endure that loneliness. After twenty-nine years of conventional marriage, he married again the following year; his high purpose, then at the height in the second year of war, was not bride enough for him, although he had grown-up daughters in his house. He was incurably romantic in his public policies for the good of humanity; his private affections were equally diffuse and wandering. He could imagine himself a Petrarch or a Dante, and invest the object of his fleeting affection with the quality and garb of a mediæval Florentine; he could transform a sub-tropic island into a land of abstract romance, unaware that these platonic affections are always silly and sometimes dangerous. He was a sentimentalist; and his sentiment fixed itself upon Colonel House, who in time became his dear friend; his dear, dear friend; his dearest friend; his second personality; his independent self.<sup>95</sup> And it appears that this close spiritual communion was not dependent upon propinquity, for House from

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his summer retreat could write, "No human agency could make me doubt your friendship and affection." This femininity is reminiscent of the days when the court-favourite prevailed. Woodrow Wilson had a feeling for humanity in the mass; but he despised his fellowmen, and could not conceal his contempt for his political associates. He demanded from others the adulation he gave to himself, and this balm could be found only in the company of women and of Colonel House. His policy was governed by their likes and dislikes. The unrestrained master of the house soon became the public tyrant.

It is yet the custom to appraise President Wilson not by his achievement but by his failure. That is the method of detraction, not of history. He failed in the attempt to transform this fallen world into a place of primitive delight. If this task is within the realm of omnipotence, it is quite certain that such power has not yet been brought to bear upon it. But even within that sphere he did not wholly fail, if one can believe a part of what the protagonists of the League of Nations profess. Yet it is quite true that all the vast and benevolent schemes of President Wilson and Colonel House one after the other col-

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lapsed at the first touch of reality; but to them the ruin was caused by some trivial accident and not by any fallacy in the schemes themselves. By these successive failures the United States was insensibly and inevitably led into war, whereas they could have drawn back had they been free to consider two single alternatives afresh.

These schemes were too vast and complicated for the personal method of government employed. They were at the mercy of every chance encounter. One example will serve. Early in 1915, Wilson and House were striving to persuade England to relax the blockade if Germany would discontinue the use of submarines and poisonous gas, a proposal which Sir Edward Grey assured them would be "considered" by his government. "This," House thought, "would be a great diplomatic triumph for the President, and it will settle our contention with both governments." <sup>96</sup> The trivial accident was a cable to Berlin from the Austrian Ambassador in Washington, that Mr. Bryan had told him that America was not in earnest. This message, the editor affirms, "carried disastrous effects, since it convinced the Germans that they could carry on their submarine campaign

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with impunity. Hence their refusal of the compromise that House suggested.”<sup>97</sup> Therein lies the peril of unofficial diplomacy; it is at the mercy of every chance gossip. “Of course,” Colonel House affirms, “Mr. Bryan did not say that.” Within a month, on the authority of the Attorney-General, he changed that opinion. “Mr. Bryan prepared a letter after the first *Lusitania* note was sent to the German Government, to the effect that they should not consider the note seriously; but the President refused to sign the letter.”<sup>98</sup> The Austrian had been well informed of this dual diplomacy.



## IV

### SUSPENSE

WHY did the Americans declare war upon Germany? That is a question history has not yet faced. They did not declare war upon Germany; they allowed themselves to be excited and manœuvred into a state of war from which the President could find no escape. Their territory was not infringed; no treaty was broken; their sovereignty was not challenged; no enemies appeared on the horizon, still less upon their land borders or upon their coasts. There was no cause of fear, no reason for panic, none in short of those inescapable forces that impelled Germany, France, England, Russia, and Belgium into the last refuge for nations desiring to endure.

There were undoubtedly many minor irritations incident to a world disturbed. American commerce was impeded by the German, English, and French navies alike. Access to Europe was more difficult

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than in time of peace, but it was the same Europe which American policy for more than a hundred years had affected to disdain. Now was the time, if ever, to give to that policy the full effect, to allow to those Europeans the privilege of solving their own problems and suffering from the follies they had brought upon themselves.

It is quite true that American financial and commercial interests were impeded by lack of transport across the troubled waters. But surely those foreign nations were entitled to employ their own ships in any service that suited their own needs. They had been carrying 92 per cent. of American foreign trade before the war; they were under no obligation to continue the service; the inconvenience of dependence upon foreign shipping has long since been understood, but nothing done to alleviate it.

It is also true that American lives had been lost in those seas, but that issue was closed in May 1916, when the War had been in progress for nearly two years, by the German agreement, given and accepted, that in future the recognized principles and practice of warfare at sea would be obeyed. But equally at the same time American lives were being

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lost in Mexico, seventeen at Vera Cruz, fifteen at Chihuahua, fifteen by an invading force at Columbus on American soil; and the President enunciated the new doctrine, that Americans operating in another country for their own private gain did so at their own risk. The old truculent doctrine, *Civis Romanus sum*, transformed by Palmerston into *Civis Britannicus sum*, had come to an end, and was not, so far as America was considered, to protect wandering adventurers who risked their lives for private gain under alien jurisdiction. The United States was not going to fight such a war as the War of Jenkins's Ear.

President Wilson did not require to fight for Americans who remained quietly at home; he was unwilling to fight for those who wantonly went under alien jurisdictions; but he was not so averse from fighting for the rights of humanity. But what after all were those rights of humanity for which he was contending at the risk of war? The right only of intruding into an area which certain nations had reserved temporarily for settling their own dispute. When a similar pre-emption was made in Texas, Colonel House's own father merely "stood

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at his door with a shotgun," quite willing for the moment to abnegate his right to walk the street. This European area was three thousand miles from the United States. No single American was disturbed in his serenity, comfort, or ease. He had in his own land the means to gratify every desire up to the most complete luxury, and his political ambition was fulfilled as the isolation from Europe became more perfect. Even his mind would be left undisturbed by the easy process of neglecting to read the newspapers.

President Wilson finally reduced his vision from humanity to "the protection of our seamen and our people in the prosecution of their peaceful legitimate errands on the high seas." The Germans were not unmindful of those peaceful and legitimate errands. They guaranteed the safety of ships by which 50,000 Americans might be transported to Europe in the course of a year. The British Government undertook to purchase every cargo from America at current rates. They even went so far as an agreement to convoy safely to neutral ports American goods equal in quantity to the amount of trade before the War. The only hardship inflicted upon the

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United States was that their citizens were debarred from the privilege of unrestrained profit arising from a state of war in Europe. They were yet free to deliver their goods at American ports to any one willing to pay for them in advance and take them away. American seamen were so few that the British Government could easily engage to subsist them at the Waldorf Hotel and pay their wages for the duration of the War.

It had never appeared to the Americans that it is a right of humanity to send goods freely into every country. For a hundred years they denied that right. Every year they kept out of their own country by means of a tariff more goods than the British Navy denied to Europe in the whole course of the War, and all that time England at least was admitting those goods free. A tariff is an act of war in times of peace as drastic as a blockade by armed force.

It was not long after the War that the United States were demanding an area of the high seas, much larger than the Germans required for their purposes, to carry out their own private warfare against persons engaged in the peaceful and legiti-

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mate errands of transporting alcoholic commodities within three miles of the American shore. They denied by threats the freedom of those seas. They demanded twelve miles, and European nations exhausted by war were compelled to submit.

It was a favourite fiction in the United States that the German Government had forced the War upon an unwilling people; and in the mind of Wilson the two were divorced. He was continually striving for some means of appealing direct to the German people over the heads of their government, as he was in the habit of appealing to his own people, in spite of House's warning that such action was really an attempt to create a revolution in a nation that was still friendly. The truth is, President Wilson finally allowed his own people to slip into war, whilst they never really desired it, and without consulting his Cabinet or their elected representatives. An important person called upon Colonel House. He had just returned from a business trip, and insisted that "he had only met one man between New York and California who wanted war." " Another observer came to tell the result of his observations in a two-weeks' trip through Kansas and Missouri.



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He believes "the people do not wish war; they do not seem to know what it is all about." <sup>100</sup>

All this time England was scrupulously careful to refrain from misleading, still less from urging the United States into the War, until they were convinced that it was for their own interest. Sir Edward Grey was a clear exponent of the American doctrine, "The best politics is to do the right thing." <sup>101</sup> In reply to a direct question from Colonel House, Lord Kitchener said, "God forbid that any nation should come into such a war." <sup>102</sup> The British Ambassador in Washington wrote to him in 1914: "I hope and believe that at any rate *one* part of the world will keep out of it." <sup>103</sup> Sincerity in a business deal or in private life could not go much further than that; and all this time the English were quite well aware "what the Germans had in store for England in case of success." If they but knew, Mr. J. W. Gerard, the American Ambassador in Berlin, continues in his letter of June 1st, 1915, to Colonel House, "the very dead in the graveyards would volunteer for the war." <sup>104</sup>

On the other hand, nearly every newspaper in America was a force impelling the President to war.

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They inflamed the public mind by the Allied propaganda so sedulously supplied to them. They ministered with a sense of virtue to that perverse passion for atrocity, and they were not compelled to inquire if the atrocities over which they gloated had really occurred. Such an unrestrained licence had not been granted to them since the days of the Cuban concentration camps preceding the Spanish War. The moving pictures could show nothing that was half so exciting. Theodore Roosevelt was goading the President into war; his own son-in-law wanted war—"war to the hilt; he said his appetite was so strong he would like to quit the Cabinet, raise a regiment, and proceed to the front."<sup>105</sup>

There was one other force of great power making for war. In the United States there is a general passion for justice, humane conduct, and kindness. This spirit was offended by the Germans, who were commonly believed to be responsible for hostilities. They did not wish to stand aside; they wished to declare their minds publicly that such things should not be. They felt their own personal honour touched; and to purge that stain they would, and did, go to war. In this passion every problem was solved or lost to

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sight. There is an instinct in things that reason knows not of. To that deep instinct the best Americans are peculiarly sensitive. Twelve years after, the average American, if put to the question, will affirm that the immediate motive was fear of Allied failure and consequent loss to American financial interests which had become inextricably bound up with Allied success. That answer is too material.

Colonel House and Woodrow Wilson with their exquisitely pacific natures never understood that men go willingly to war for their own freedom—freedom from the domestic and feminine entanglements of civil life; the truculent tyranny of office, factory, and shop; the care of work, wages, and the daily bread. The soldier goes proudly because he is free—free from the mean and irksome routine of life. For that aimless and sordid existence he has gained a life of high purpose and of honourable rivalry; a life of equality in which every man from soldier to commander is equally bound by obedience to a single law which is not the law of men, where the rights and privileges of all are mutually respected and assured. There was the chance of adventure into an old world which to the American

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youth was a new land of romance; and whatever may be said against war, war is interesting with fresh and great emotions. With these primitive passions the President had to contend.

All through these Papers much is made of Woodrow Wilson's conscience, as if he alone were in possession of that inconvenience against doing wrong. Conscience to be effective must be automatic. When a man becomes self-conscious of his conscience, he interferes with its free and salutary operation. He begins to sophisticate, and ends in a condition of unconscious self-righteousness which is closely allied with hypocrisy. Conscience unchecked by the divine will makes a man hard, obstinate, fanatical; unsympathetic and contemptuous towards his fellowmen. Woodrow Wilson was so convinced of his own integrity, and so confident of his own "purposes," that all who gave anything less than full compliance and support were to him the enemy who should be handed over to the power of Colonel House to be destroyed. In truth, Colonel House became his familiar, his "second self," and his conscience too. This idolatry has always been the peril of emotional men.

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Professor Seymour is something less than just when he defines this wisdom of Colonel House as "serpentine." One may draw back or choose an easier way without doing wrong or giving offence. When it was proposed to House that he should go to church, "he compromised by having Loulie go." Had a similar proposal been made to Mr. Wilson, even if he wanted to go, he would have stayed away, just because he was asked to go. The easy middle course, having his wife go, would never have occurred to him; and yet it was this tradition of Wilson's uncompromising rectitude that captured the public mind and led it towards war.

But Colonel House had a conscience too, and it was at variance with the conscience of his patron. Henceforth there was a divided allegiance on the part of both, and a compromise that was fatal to Wilson. Left to himself, he knew no compromise. Colonel House, without being untrue to himself, was an adept in those small compromises, in those amenities, that make a wise man winsome to his fellow-men. He evaded when evasion was useful; he was silent when he disagreed or when everything had been said. In the dark hour of decision,

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he was a doubtful friend. He told the President that a crisis had come, "that he should meet it in a creditable way so that his influence would not be lessened when he came to do the great work which would necessarily follow the War. I thought he was too refined, too intellectual, too cultivated not to see the incongruity and absurdity of war. It needs a man of coarser fibre and one less a philosopher than the President to conduct a brutal, vigorous, and successful war." <sup>106</sup> And yet Sir Edward Grey, Mr. A. J. Balfour, Mr. Asquith, and Sir Douglas Haig were refined, intellectual, cultivated men, and one of them at least was a philosopher. For nearly three years they had been carrying on war with vigour and success, and the task did not seem to them absurd. It seemed inevitable, just, and righteous. The President was confused by these doubts cast upon his own infallibility.

When the great decision was about to be taken, Colonel House comforted the President almost in the very words of the Perfect Counsellor to the Perfect Prince: "You have justice on your side; for that war is just which is necessary, and it is piety to fight where no hope lies in any other course." And like



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the Perfect Counsellor, he was not sparing of the truth: "The crisis was difficult, and I said it was one for which he was not well fitted. He admitted this and said he did not believe he was fitted for the Presidency under such conditions. I felt that he had taken a gamble that there would be no war and had lost." Woodrow Wilson had always unwittingly followed the precept of that astute Italian, now fallen into unjust disrepute: "A Prince is ever to consult but at his own, not other people's pleasure, and rather to deter people from giving their advice undemanded; but he ought not to be sparing in his demands, nor when he has demanded, impatient of hearing the truth." Colonel House would have been still more perfect, had he refrained from dictating these intimacies to the faithful Miss Denton, for after all the President was a hero to him.

In this struggle Wilson had against him the secret mind of Colonel House, who had a year ago recorded his final judgment, "I have concluded that war is inevitable."<sup>107</sup> He had against him the impassioned opinion of his Ambassador in England, Mr. Walter H. Page, who from the first "regarded immediate intervention as inevitable," and contin-

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ued to press that opinion so steadfastly that he was considered unneutral and was recalled,<sup>108</sup> "for a vacation to get some American atmosphere into him again."<sup>109</sup> These two had lived in England. Wilson had not. And England without intent casts a spell upon every man of English speech.

Had Woodrow Wilson himself breathed something of that generous atmosphere suffused with suffering and purified by sacrifice, it would have mitigated his hard bloodless rigidity, even if it lessened the grandeur of his American virtue.

## V

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WOODROW WILSON had a genius for saying the thing that was right for the moment, in the right words. But the things he said were so true that not even his friends believed he meant what he said or said precisely what he meant. He did both. Those who were neutral to him misunderstood him with elaborate ease; his enemies distorted the plain meaning of his words. Even his faithful friend, Colonel House, was apologetic, and lamented that he did not take his words from him. Those who knew nothing else of Wilson thought they knew four of his famous dogmas. They falsified one, and misunderstood all. The tragedy in Wilson's life is that he himself was manœuvred off the firm ground he took in the first moment of his inspiration. His mistake was in making any utterance whatever. That is the danger of the sentimentalist. He entertained two contrary opinions; to think was to do; his desire

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was the fact; his world was an imagined one; words were separable from deeds.

From the first he was resolute to remain neutral and keep his country out of war. That was the desire of all rational Americans. After the War was in progress for more than two years, they expressed that desire by electing him President for a second term on that sole issue. From the first he urged the people to remain neutral in thought, word, and deed. And yet, within a month after his second inauguration, the United States was at war. He was neutral as between the belligerents; he was warlike on behalf of humanity which had not invoked his aid. He failed to foresee that his vague efforts on behalf of humanity were bound to bring him into conflict with one or other of the belligerent sides. Worse still, humanity was not inspired by hope nor the belligerents by fear, since he had no weapon in his hand. Humanity to him was composed of the neutral nations, and they were doing very well as a result of the War. The belligerent nations were interested in his efforts according to the chance of their own victory or the probability of defeat. Their aim was victory: his aim was peace, but not a victori-

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ous peace. He protested continually that such was not his purpose. Therefore, he became an enemy to every prospective victor in turn.

With the causes and objects of the War, he protested, he had no concern. That was precisely true. He had no part in the Franco-Prussian War, and was not responsible for its present consequences; he had nothing to do with the formation of the various alliances; he had not inspired the German fear of Russia, nor the Austrian desire of access to the Ægean sea; he had not guaranteed the inviolability of Belgium. From the objects of the War he was equally detached. Alsace, Lorraine, Constantinople, the littoral of the English Channel were to him merely geographical names. To convict him of absurdity, his term "objects" was distorted into "consequences." He was not blind to the consequences, and he proposed to deal with them as they developed. That was the meaning of his policy of "preparedness," and his demand for a real American army and navy. He merely meant that he would not go to war for the attainment of other nations' preconceived objects which he neither understood nor approved.

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In his search for an understanding of those objects, he was not helped by the combatants. He had observed that "the objects on both sides, as stated in general terms to their own people and the world, are virtually the same." That observation was correct. The statement was the same. Each side declared equally the high object in view—national freedom and security. The Germans demanded nothing more: the French and English demanded nothing less. Wilson merely requested that they be more specific, that he be told how they proposed to achieve those ends? Did Germany require Belgium, the Channel ports, and the French colonies? Did France demand Alsace and Lorraine? Was England to deny the Freedom of the Seas? Not one of the belligerents made reply. There was reason for his irony and suspicion.

Wilson had formally declared his mind in the outset: "The example of America must be a special example, and must be an example not merely of peace because it will not fight, but because peace is a healing and elevating influence in the world, and strife is not. There is such a thing as a man being too proud to fight; there is such a thing as a nation



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being so right that it does not need to convince others by force that it is right." That statement—there is such a thing as a man being too proud to fight—is also profoundly true. Colonel House describes Wilson as "a son of man." Wilson had ample warrant for personal pacifism in the conduct of that prototype whom all good men strive to imitate, but his plain meaning was distorted and falsified from "man" to "nation." Neither he nor his people were strong enough to endure the taunt. "It is just as hard," he said, "to do your duty when men are sneering at you as when they are shooting at you. When they sneer at you they can wound your heart." He was sneered into war against "the verdict of his conscience." He had reasoned falsely from the analogy of private with public life. Too proud to fight—may be advisable for the individual; he never suspected the extension of the dogma into national life. He did not blame the Belgians. They did not ratiocinate upon their conduct; they were too busily engaged in convincing the Germans that they were wrong, by driving them out of Belgium.

War, like any human action, is good or bad according to the motive that inspires it, but account

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must also be taken of the result. In the United States the motives were mixed, and they were finally merged into the vague hypothetical aspiration to end war and make the world safe for democracy. The American soldier was of all men the most miserable, unsupported in his misery by any definite human emotion. It was not enough in that hour that he was making the world safe for democracy or the United States safe for the Democrats. He had the sense that war can be ended only by not going to war. And of the results, after these ten years, every man must judge for himself. To speculate upon the future—that would be to imitate Colonel House. A nation that goes to war for an unworthy motive will be condemned at the bar of history. The United States entered the War from many minor motives, but from no great single one, and so missed the spiritual advantage of action proceeding from singleness of heart. What would have happened if they had not entered the War belongs to the realm of prophecy.

The essence of tragedy is a good man striving with the forces of evil. Woodrow Wilson was a good man, and war to him was evil. Colonel House has

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given a poignant account of the dramatic action during those hours. He was "the only man who could be expected to hurry the President."<sup>110</sup> An unnamed person and the Secretary of War urged him twice to come to Washington to stir him into action, and have Congress called. Another unnamed person called, complaining that the President had no policy, or at least had disclosed none to his closest followers or to the Cabinet. Another person, also unnamed, reported that there was something akin to panic in Washington over this hesitation, and feared a strike in Cabinet and official circles. On March 24th the Secretary for War "sought out the President's adviser in desperation." He had seen the President on the previous day, but could get no "line upon his thought," except the comment, "we must put excited feeling away." He had fought with himself night after night, in the hope of seeing some other way out. "What else can I do?" said Wilson. "Is there anything else I can do?"<sup>111</sup> To another he said, "If there is any alternative, for God's sake let us take it."

Five days before the assemblage of Congress for the declaration of a state of war, "the President had

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done no more than jot down the topics he meant to treat," and Colonel House was beset by members of the Cabinet curious and anxious; but he "evaded a direct answer," because even he did not know.<sup>112</sup> On the morning before, neither the Secretary of War nor any member of the Cabinet knew whether it would be peace or war. It was the afternoon before he showed the text to Colonel House. He did not show it to the Cabinet: "Every man would have had some suggestion to make; he preferred to keep it to himself."

These Intimate Papers come to an end on April 2nd, 1917, the day that Wilson asked that the existence of a state of war be declared between the United States and Germany, and "Congress roared cheer after cheer in an outburst of patriotic enthusiasm."<sup>113</sup> One looks with vain regret for light upon their conduct of war and their terms of peace. Great events turn on small causes, and human affairs are precarious. Most persons are agreed that the Treaty of Versailles lacked something of wisdom and finality; and more specifically, that President Wilson failed to convince the world that salvation could come through him alone. The cause of this failure

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is alleged in a lamentable note by the editor:<sup>114</sup>

“The illness which laid Colonel House low just before the meeting of the Paris Peace Conference prevented him from carrying through the organization he planned. ‘One serious misfortune—which proved to be a disaster—befell the Conference through the illness of Colonel House. Consequently his guiding influence was absent when it was most sorely needed; and before he could resume his activities, things had gone too far for him to mend.’”

The explanation is too trivial. The task was too great even for Colonel House in the best of health. His power had gone from him. He and his patron had parted company for ever.

Again, there were causes deeper still. The Fourteen Points were accepted by the vanquished as a mitigation of the surrender; by the victors as the price of the remission of all their debts to the United States. When they discovered that this was no part of the bargain, they lost interest in Wilson’s high aims. They had never been taken seriously. The Turks when they made their first advance to England for surrender declared that they would accept twenty-eight points, if necessary, and in proof of

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good faith, would arrange for the assassination of the minor members of their Cabinet who might be recalcitrant.

All the vast and benevolent designs of Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House fell into ruin—the pan-American pact, interference in Mexico, the proposal that Europe disarm, the suggestion of a Conference to govern future wars, and the final suggestion that the actual war be stopped. In the United States also their personal government failed, because it should fail. It was intolerable that free men should be denied access to their responsible government, and compelled to resort to a private “study” in New York. It was improper, it might be dangerous, that men like J. P. Morgan, Paul Warburg, Otto Kahn, Jacob Schiff, James Speyer, Edward Frick, Josiah Quincy, Carter Glass, Henry L. Higginson, Cleveland Dodge, heads of the business, banking, and railroad world, should have been compelled upon perfectly legitimate matters to negotiate in secret with a private person. Each one felt the affront, and left that place as an enemy. Such men are not conspirators. Congress nursed its wrath, and destroyed the President when he bore the bur-



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den of peace. As one Senator sapiently observed: "The time to give a man a kick is when you meet him coming around the corner with a bag of salt on his back." Absolute power breeds its own destruction. Its very existence, no matter how wisely used, becomes an offence.

These Papers of Colonel House, intimate as they are, do not add to our knowledge of the general causes or sequence of the War. That is known from European sources. They shed no light on the American operations, since they stop short before military operations began. But they are a revelation of an engaging, unusual, and ingenious personality; more important still, they are a revelation of the mind of Woodrow Wilson and of American political life. They will be scanned by every person who must inform himself of the probable conduct of the United States in the larger world into which they so unwillingly emerged.

Woodrow Wilson is one of the tragic figures of history. He was the most powerful man in the world. He was a good man, but rather in the worse sense of the word: the certain man who trusted in himself that he was righteous and despised others; and yet

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he was forced by events into a course he knew to be wrong, not staunch enough to stand and let events pass him by to their appointed end. In the final moment of indecision, it was not enough for him that his country wished for war; he would do what was right. And yet he went to war. He knew he had done wrong to himself, and he sought for approval of the wrong he had done. That torment of conscience was the cause of his truculence at Versailles. More, the shadow of death was upon him, and in that shadow there is often a display of childishness and senility. Only by a League of Nations to end all war would he be justified, and when his own people refused to him that absolution, the end came.

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### III. COLONEL LAWRENCE

#### THE MYTH—THE TRUTH

Onager assuetus in solitudine; nullus avertet eam.  
[JER. II. 24].

*Revolt in the Desert.* By "T. E. Lawrence." (Cape, 1927. George H. Doran Company, New York, 1927.)

All the references in the following pages refer to the Edition published by Messrs. Jonathan Cape, Ltd.





T. E. LAWRENCE

*from a portrait by Augustus John*

# I

## THE MYTH

THIS book, *Revolt in the Desert*, emerges into a world of suspicion and surmise. It is a tale already told and spoiled in the telling. In this atmosphere of suspicion a reviewer must proceed with care. Too often he has been deceived by manuscripts found in copper cylinders, letters written by ladies of quality, diaries discovered in seamen's chests, and the writings of too precocious children. The device is as old as the oldest satirist and new as the most recent adventurer. Certain conventions the reviewer is willing to accept, as he accepts the scene of the dramatist or the stage of the actor. When the dramatist or the actor attempts to convert the fiction into fact, that is to him a transgression of the literary art. The reviewer must then perform the function of the critic, as a judge will accept a statement for what it is worth, but will make strict inquisition into perjury.

*Revolt in the Desert* by "T. E. Lawrence" suffers

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under this disability. The very name of the author on the title-page in both the English and American editions is enclosed in quotation marks, a specious device to create a mystery, as if he had no real existence. A man is entitled to his own reticence, but when he publishes a book he must remember two things: if it is a work of fiction, no one cares about his existence; if it is a work of reality, he wilfully defeats his purpose by casting doubt upon his own veracity. Who cares about the existence of "Shakespeare?" But as Walter Bagehot says of him, "Yet surely, people do not keep a tame steam-engine to write their books; and if those books were really written by a man, he must have been a man who could write them; he must have had the thoughts which they express, have acquired the knowledge they contain, have possessed the style in which we read them."

To a writer of prose, the scraps of Shakespeare's prose are precious as his poetry. And when one does really come to Colonel Lawrence's book, one makes the amazing discovery that Colonel Lawrence writes precisely as Shakespeare might have written had he chosen the more difficult mode. He has the discern-



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ing eye and the selecting glance of a Hebrew annalist or prophet; he has the sequence and fall of words to which the English ear has become accustomed by reading our translation of those annals and prophecies and the Greek gospels. He shares that distinction in modern times with one other person alone. Artistic presentation is rare enough, and one becomes impatient of this futile hugger-mugger by which the author has attempted to conceal himself and obscure the style and beauty of his work.

And yet the genesis of the book is simple enough. Colonel Lawrence kept a diary of his two years in the desert. With the eye of the artist he saw his daily adventure displayed upon the page. "The rush of news made my diary fat," he wrote after a memorable day. In his own preface—foreword he calls it—to the English edition, he explains quite clearly, "this book, written in 1919, was printed on a newspaper press in Oxford shortly after, not for publication but as a convenience to myself and my friends." There was a demand for the book, and the idea arose "of a richly produced edition, with many portrait drawings, to be published by subscription at a stiff price." That venture failed; but to pay the

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artists the author sold "the right to bring out this abridgment," which is one-half of the original text, "but fairly represents all sides of the story." As it was a matter of expense, one would gladly exchange the pictures for the remainder of the text. They are sixteen in number, of the usual war-picture type, in which the painter striving for strength achieves ugliness, and searching for character finds only caricature. In the pencil sketch of the author, however, there is a calculated beauty which one is free to compare with authentic photographs familiar from another source.

But a mystery must still be made of this normal publication. In the American edition there is an introduction, unsigned, in which it is alleged that the "400,000-word book" written in 1919 was stolen in the Reading railway station, that "Lawrence sat down with an heroic effort of memory to rewrite the account," and that "he had it printed on a newspaper press in Oxford in an edition limited to eight copies, of which three were afterwards destroyed." The further allegation is that the rewritten book was abridged by "a friendly man of letters." Another American writer, Mr. L. Thomas, elaborated this

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story in a book published three years previously, from which it appears that the theft occurred at Paddington, and that the material stolen was the only copy of the author's "200,000-word manuscript, the journals he had kept faithfully, and many historical documents." Again "his friends prevailed upon him to rewrite the book." Further detail is that the author printed six copies of the book on a hand-press in the Epping Forest. Of these "a few were presented to friends, and one copy went to the British Museum Library to be locked up in a vault for forty years." One cannot say that no such theft occurred, although Lawrence makes no mention of it. Only a fool would expect to be believed when he says that the author rewrote the book from memory. His own account is sufficient and obviously correct. A man is not asked to take the world into his confidence. Equally, he must not expect the world to believe in confidences that are fictitious, when propagated by friends and assented to by his silence.

During the War the military services of Colonel Lawrence in Arabia were fully appraised and adequately recognized. After the War he had an honoured place at the Peace Conference, and in the

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Colonial Office for two years more until his work was done. Then, in 1922, he went his own way, like many another, desiring only to be left alone in his native shyness, with no further "interest in the subject which was exhausted long ago in the actual experience of it." <sup>1</sup> In 1919 he wrote a book describing that experience, which he printed privately, "as a convenience to himself and his friends." He desired to forget that too, a desire quite common to soldiers and authors alike. But in 1924 a book of quite another kind appeared in the United States, issued by "The Century Company." In its own category and of its own kind it is an excellent book; but it put an end to Colonel Lawrence's dream of silence, and brought into peril his reputation as a soldier, a scholar, and a man of sense. The genesis of that book must be recorded. A legend can only be destroyed by showing how and why it arose.

To Colonel Lawrence in Arabia came an "American Mission" composed of two persons—Mr. L. Thomas and Mr. H. A. Chase. Early in 1917 they "left America to gather information and secure a pictorial record of the struggle then in progress from the North Sea to far-off Arabia." From "one of the

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mysterious high-priests of the Minister of Information" in London they obtained a permit to go to Palestine; and in Jerusalem they encountered Colonel Lawrence, who was in Arab dress and otherwise suitable for their purpose. From General Allenby they received permission to visit Colonel Lawrence at Akaba, which is in Arabia, although on the coast of the Red Sea. They went up the Nile by steamer to Khartum, by railway to Suakim, and thence by steamer across the Red Sea to Akaba. The result of this visit was a book entitled *With Lawrence in Arabia*. The title is quite correct, as that seaport town is in Arabia; and it will not appear to an alert reader that the visitors actually affirm that they were with him in any other place. But it will require a reader of great alertness to make that discovery. With equal candour, a visit to St. Omer would warrant a journalist in publishing a book entitled *With Haig in Flanders*.

The writer is careful to state that during the "many hours" spent with Lawrence in Jerusalem he "made many unsuccessful attempts to induce him to tell something of his life and adventures in the desert, but he always adroitly changed the subject.

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Even concerning his connection with the Arabian army he would say nothing, except to give credit to the Arab leaders and his British associates." In Akaba his success in eliciting information was much better; and in his profession of making pictures he achieved a triumph; he tells how it was done, "even at the expense of disclosing a profound secret." His camera-man, Mr. Chase, used a high-speed camera, and "after much strategy and after using all the artifices learned as a reporter on a Chicago newspaper, where it was worth one's job to fail to bring back a photograph of the fair lady involved in the latest scandal, he finally manœuvred Lawrence into allowing Chase to take a 'sitting shot' on two occasions." Whilst he kept the victim's attention by "a rapid fire of questions regarding our prospected trip to the 'lost city of Petra,' which he believed to be the primary object of our visit, Mr. Chase himself took a dozen pictures."

He dwells upon the ease with which the thing is done: "Working out of doors in good light, if you've got a graphlex and don't get stricken with buck-fever, you can get a photograph of St. Vitus himself." He realized that "Lawrence was one of the



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most romantic figures of the War"; that they "had a great scoop." Frequently "Chase snapped pictures of the Colonel without his knowledge, or just at the instant that he turned and found himself facing the lens and discovered our perfidy." He compares himself and his confederate with two experienced hunters, "one to act as decoy and the other to do the shooting." And yet this is not quite convincing. There are seventy photographs in the book. Many of them are obvious—the author himself on top of a camel delicately silhouetted against the sky, the author in Arab head-gear, a muezzin calling the faithful to prayer, the familiar scenes the tourist finds on post-cards ready made for his convenience. There are pictures, too, of Lawrence disguised as a Gipsy woman of which one can affirm nothing, the disguise being so complete; but there are too many pictures of him carefully posed as "The dreamer whose dreams came true"; "The Arabian Knight," which is an admirable "caption"; "The Mystery Man of Arabia"; the incarnation of "The prophet."

When Mr. Thomas first saw Lawrence in Jerusalem, and observed "the dignity with which he carried his five feet three, making him every inch a

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king or perhaps a caliph in disguise, with his hands folded, his blue eyes wrapped in some inner contemplation, his expression serene, almost saintly, in its selflessness and repose"—his "first thought was that he might be one of the younger Apostles returned to life." This was a real "scoop," a fitting hero of the screen. "In Calcutta, Colonel Robert 'Lorraine' said to me," the writer records, "'But if Lawrence is so extremely modest and shy, why did he pose for so many photographs for you?'" That question, asked, too, by many less distinguished persons in places less remote, remains incompletely answered, even after all this elaborate disclosure of professional secrets. Persons who have never seen moving pictures may be unaware that the pictures are fabricated. A picture of the Casino at Monte Carlo, which is a favourite subject, is not a photograph of that serious and gloomy place of business, but a photograph of a contraption erected in California by a stage-carpenter from a design which has no existence save in his own ignorant and flamboyant mind. The "silent drama" may be built up from a series of pictures that are "filmed" in the most diverse circumstances, and a writer then engaged

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to make a "continuity" of such pictures as are placed before him. His "scenario" may read: The comedian walks to the oven; he removes a custard pie; he throws the pie at the villain; the pie strikes the villain in the face; the villain sits down in a basket of eggs.

Less experienced persons, who have attended a lecture illustrated by "slides," may have observed that the operator frequently displays the wrong slide or introduces it upside down. The lecturer will continue his discourse, quite unconscious that he is describing the Jaffa Gate whilst the audience is looking at a picture of the Horse Guards, and being equally ignorant of both will not detect the difference. If the mistake is obvious, that will add humour to the lecture, and supply the element of absurdity that must never be absent from an entertainment in which pictures are employed. The audience has the moving-picture mind; they know the conventions; they grant the lack of continuity, the lack of perspective, the absence of colour, and the use of light and shade alone. These conventions must be granted to Mr. Thomas, and within the limits of his art he has produced an excellent performance. He is not

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writing history. He moves in the realm of fiction, but at times checks himself by the appearance of fact, so that his fiction may not pass into the grotesque, for there is a limit even to the absurd. When the pictures were secured, the showman had to make his "continuity," and it must be rather elaborate, for he was about to pass over from the realm of pictures into the more defined realm of the printed book. He "found it impossible to extract much information from Lawrence himself; he insisted on giving the entire credit to the Arab leaders and to his fellow-adventurers, Wilson, Joyce, Dawnay, Bassett, Vickery, Cornwallis, Hogarth, and Stirling," and to General Clayton. From these the writer appears to have extracted something, and the rest he secured by methods familiar to him as a reporter for the Chicago press.

With his pictures and text he returned to America "to tell the world"; the words are his own. To that end, "he started a tour of the continent." To his astonishment, they were invited to appear for a season at Covent Garden Royal Opera House, London, "a thing we had never dreamed might occur, because our material had been obtained solely for

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America." With his incapacity for using words in their exact meaning, he ascribes this invitation to "conspirators" whom he names, and especially to a theatrical impresario who "inveigled" him to London with his production, "With Allenby in Palestine and Lawrence in Arabia." He was anxious to exhibit his production to Colonel Lawrence himself, but could not find him. He received a letter instead, "I saw your show last night. And thank God the lights were out." This was followed by a visit: "He implored me to return to America." Mr. Thomas discovered to his chagrin that his performance "embarrassed" him exceedingly. Upon this strange modesty he moralizes, "There are those who say that Lawrence has received too much publicity through me; they piously declare that this is not in accordance with military ethics; no matter how much unselfish work a man does for his country there are always people ready to tear his record to pieces." But that was not the cause of Colonel Lawrence's embarrassment. A showman lives on publicity. He does not understand that a soldier is not a showman. The only publicity he values is the mere "mention" of his name in official dispatches, and

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the few further words that may be added to justify him in receiving some honour or award. The ribbons on his breast tell the whole story to an experienced eye. Soldiers are afraid of showmen, lest they be praised; and publicity of that kind is accepted as proof that they are unworthy of the austere "mention" that alone counts in the army. But Mr. Thomas generously absolves Colonel Lawrence, and ascribes all blame to himself: "The blame should *all* be mine."

Yet again, the question forces itself, Where did Mr. Thomas find a verbal record that in parts is so specific? He must have had access to one at least of various sources—either to Lawrence's journal, to the manuscript alleged to have been stolen, or to the book that was privately printed in Oxford. He writes: "The entry into Yenbo was splendid and barbaric. Emir Feisal, as commander-in-chief of the Arabian army, rode in front, dressed in robes as white as the snows of Lebanon. On his right rode another shereef, garbed in dark red, his head-cloth, tunic, and cloak dyed with henna. On Feisal's left rode Shereef Lawrence, in pure white robes, looking like the reincarnation of a prophet of old. Behind



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them were Bedouins carrying three large banners of purple silk, topped with gold spikes, and followed by a minstrel twanging a lute and three drummers playing a weird march. After them came a bouncing, billowy mass of thousands of wild sons of Ishmael, on camels, all members of Feisal's and Lawrence's body-guard. They were packed together in a dense throng as they passed down the corridor of palm-trees, under the minarets of the mosque. The riders were wearing robes of every colour, and from their saddles hung gay trappings and rich brocades. It was indeed a resplendent cavalcade. All were singing at the tops of their nasal voices, improvising verses descriptive of the virtues of Emir Feisal and his fair-haired 'grand vizier.' "

Unfortunately, Colonel Lawrence was not in the procession at all. On the night of this fabricated entry into Yenbo, he was asleep on board the *Suva*, "undisturbed, and sleeping splendidly at last, eight hours' unbroken rest." <sup>2</sup> Mr. Thomas has lost continuity; he put his slide in the wrong place; but for moving-picture purposes the account with embellishments is much more effective than the precise statement by Colonel Lawrence describing a march

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in the contrary direction at a later period: "Every one burst out singing a full-throated song in honour of Emir Feisal and his family. The march became rather splendid and barbaric. First rode Feisal in white, then Sharraf at his right in red head-cloth and henna-dyed tunic and cloak, myself on his left in white and scarlet, behind us three banners of faded crimson silk with gilt spikes, behind them the drummers playing a march, and behind them again the wild mass of twelve hundred bouncing camels of the body-guard, packed as closely as they could move, the men in every variety of coloured clothes and the camels nearly as brilliant in their trappings. We filled the valley to its banks with our flashing stream." <sup>3</sup> As Colonel Lawrence was not present on the previous occasion, there was no song in praise of the "fair-haired grand vizier," no reincarnation of a prophet of old, no robes white as the snows of Lebanon, no weird march, no corridor of palm-trees, no minarets or mosques. And Mr. Thomas was not there either; he had not yet left America. Those who care to inquire further might consider as a source the publication of the grosser parts of Lawrence's writing in *The World's Work*,

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which an intimate friend admits was done by himself under a friendly and charitable arrangement with the author.

In the vast War fiction that has grown up in the United States a single type of hero prevails. He must refuse to salute his officers, must be careless in his dress; contemptuous of rules, regulations, and orders; smart, impudent or insolent in his answers; and he cannot exist without the comic element. The proper complement of these heroic and comic qualities are imputed to Colonel Lawrence in the American book. He is "a youngster not out of his twenties," when in reality he was twenty-eight years old; he is refused for service: "the members of the Medical Board looked at the frail tow-headed youth, winked at one another, and told him to run home to his mother and wait until the next war." In the moving pictures everything goes by jumps. Therefore this hero jumps on a camel and rides forty-nine hours, jumps "in an aeroplane and taxies to Arabia," jumps on a ship and steams to Cairo.

It would be difficult for any reputation to stand against these pictures; impossible to survive elabor-

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ate printed fabrications. They are intended to be admirable, but what is admirable is an affair of experience and taste. The account, for example, of his imaginary activities "when he once had a fortnight to spare," penetrating the Turkish lines, disguised as a woman, riding "several hundred miles" to Baalbek, returning by way of Damascus, will suggest at once that the American objective was not for military reasons, but for mention of a place that yields excellent pictures of ruined temples. The mere allegation of indignities suffered by Colonel Lawrence on the imaginary adventure would be quite enough to account for his resolve to conceal himself from his fellow-men. After that, readers will find it hard to believe that he was a daring, resourceful, and courageous soldier, which he was, and not a figment created for the screen.

And yet we are indebted to the industry of Mr. Thomas for many details of Colonel Lawrence's early life, many of which are correct. County Galway was the home of his family. He was born at Carnarvon in Wales; five years of boyhood were spent in Jersey, three in Scotland, some years in

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France, then in Oxford, where he attended the high school until he entered the University. At this point we may pass to the sure ground of formal record: Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Edward Lawrence, C.B. 1917; D.S.O. 1918; Prince of Mecca; Archæologist; Arabic scholar, Research Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford, 1919. Educated, Jesus College, Oxford; 1st Class Modern History School, 1910; Magdalen College, Oxford. Senior Demy, B.A. 1911; went to the East 1914; 2nd Lieutenant, 1914; Colonel, 1917; organized the forces of the King of the Hedjaz against the Turks, 1917; Chevalier Legion of Honour; Croix de Guerre with palms; on Staff of Prince Feisal; attended Peace Conference, 1919. Address: All Souls College, Oxford.<sup>4</sup> In a subsequent edition the entry is less specific and more restrained: Born in Wales, August 15th, 1888. The D.S.O. and C.B. disappear, also Prince of Mecca and the French decorations. It was in 1910, he went to the Euphrates; the military record reads: Lieutenant-Colonel, for Colonel, attached to Staff of General Sir F. Wingate, Hedjaz Expeditionary Force, 1917, transferred to General Allenby's Staff, 1918. British Delegation, Peace Conference, 1919;

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Adviser on Arab Affairs, Colonial Office, 1921-22.  
No address is given.<sup>5</sup>

Falling back again upon other sources, it would appear that Colonel Lawrence abandoned his honours and awards as a protest against the failure to fulfil the promises he had made to the Arabs of dominion over Syria; that he had acquired his knowledge of the East on a pilgrimage of two years in native dress; that after the War he joined the Army under an assumed name and is now actually serving in the Air Force in India. This last is susceptible of proof. Indeed, Lawrence in his preface of three paragraphs to the present book, issued in 1927, refers to "the barracks which have been my home since 1922." He surrendered his honours too readily. There had been promises to the French and Russians as well as to the Arabs; but it is consoling to know that in the end he was satisfied. In a letter to a friend he writes, "In my opinion, Churchill's settlement has honourably fulfilled our war-obligations and my hopes."

It is one of the ironies and humours of the War, the curious occupations in which distinguished soldiers are now engaged, content in their obscurity.



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But Colonel Lawrence in striving for obscurity defeated his purpose. He failed to remind himself that he was not merely one amongst many, and that the new generation whilst bored by remembrance of the War in general is interested in the particular, and excited by persons and events that minister to their love for the dramatic. The way of obscurity is the daily round. If Colonel Lawrence had contented himself with a post in the War Office or as a Colonial governor, he would have achieved his purpose; but when he gave cause for his inevitable and gratuitous biographers to allege that he "streaks about England on a high-power motor-cycle" or builds for himself a bungalow in Epping Forest, where he keeps cows, and paints upon the structure four red wheels to conform with the law against the erection of a stationary edifice, he is sure to be noticed. Indeed, this eccentricity, studied or unconscious, is bound to suggest not the desire for obscurity but for publicity. For these activities again we have only doubtful evidence, but they have become part of the legend.

The American writer by an obvious play upon words continually refers to Colonel Lawrence as the

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Arabian Knight, and wonders why he failed to acquire an authentic title. Two things are strange even to more astute persons: why one does not acquire the distinction; and, still more strange, why and how another does. The reason ascribed to Colonel Lawrence is that he feared "his tailor would hear about it and double his bills, whilst he had trouble enough paying them as it was." Nothing could more clearly disclose his simplicity of mind. The probability is that the tailor would demand payment of the bill actually owing, as he must long since have discovered that those distinguished personages are the most ill-dressed in the kingdom, and relying upon their titular distinction, for ever after forswear the services of any tailor whatever.

In 1927 the publisher of *Revolt in the Desert* issued also a book entitled *Lawrence and the Arabs* by that most authentic poet, Mr. Robert Graves. It is less interesting than Mr. Thomas's, because it is more accurate, and excessive accuracy about things that do not matter is always tiresome. It describes the previous account as "inaccurate and sentimental," and in parts ridiculous. Mr. Graves then proceeds to correct his predecessor. It appears that Law-

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rence also is merely "a name of convenience" like Ross, or Shaw, by which he chose to call himself, the last formally acquired by legal process. That would account for the enclosure of the name on the title-page within quotation marks; although a man does not change himself by changing his name. The head of the literary clan bearing the last name was obliged to inform a clergyman in the house of Thomas Hardy that this newest recruit was not his son. It was four months, not two years, Lawrence spent as a student in Arabia, and he wore European dress and brown boots; he was not a technical scholar, he never learned the Arabic letters, and his speech was the jest of his servants; he went on a secret mission to the Tigris, but not to the head-hunters of Borneo.

We are set right about the various publications. The original book was entitled *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*; the first eight chapters were stolen; they were rewritten from his diaries; this is the book that was first printed, and afterwards published in an edition of one hundred copies for subscribers at thirty guineas apiece. The loss was £10,000, and it was to repay this loss the *Revolt in the Desert* was sold.

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The abridgment was made in two nights by himself and two friends. Mr. Graves assures us that the *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* will not be published in Lawrence's lifetime; he thinks it is not a book which should be published for a popular audience. An electrician was shown the most painful chapter; "he could do no work for a week, but walked up and down the pavement outside his house, unable to rid his mind of the horror of it." Mr. Graves fears further that libel actions might result; and in any case the censor might ban as obscene certain accounts of the methods of warfare prevalent in Arabia.

Mr. Graves is much more derogatory of his hero than Mr. Thomas is, since he descends with intimate knowledge into the mean trivialities of his barrack life, records contemptuous opinions of him, and the coarse words in which those opinions were expressed; he gives currency to baseless rumours of indignities suffered by Lawrence at the hands of his captors and of ill-mannered conduct towards his superior officers. The stories set down as amusing are merely stupid, and many are not true. No British officer ever wired to the "Surgeon-General" that he

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intended to shoot his wounded; the name itself was abandoned in the army thirty years ago. No man can be at the same time a hero and a poltroon. Mr. Graves alleges that Colonel Lawrence allowed himself to be struck in the face by a major in the Army Medical Corps. Therefore the story is incredible.

But, strangest of all, Mr. Graves does not appear to have discovered that Colonel Lawrence has written a book that is worthy to rank with the best works in English prose. He actually complains that the book is "too well written, too much a part of literature" to be a great book; and he ascribes whatever virtue the book contains to "the advice of two of the best-known English writers," by whose help "he taught himself to write professionally." One would like to know who those masters were, so that he too might learn in their school. He missed the mark. Colonel Lawrence is an artist; that and nothing less. To Mr. Graves, "his blind desire to be a literary artist is the more to be wondered at, because he might be something better than a mere artist." He might have been, as Mr. Graves suggests, "Emperor" of the Arabs, if it were not "that artists are

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the only class of human being to which he would wish to belong."

Colonel Lawrence bewilders his biographers because his character is so simple. They may labour as they like; they can make of him nothing more than a man of unusual courage, an artist in search of new emotions. They have effectually concealed that, although at times his own sparkling prose does shine through their arid paraphrase and hard accretions. What Sergeant Pugh says of Aircraftman Shaw, his latest name, is of no interest. What any sergeant says of any private soldier has no interest apart from the style he employs. They have left him in the position of a facetious humorist, from which the present writing is an attempt to rescue him, so that his book may receive the attention it deserves.



## II

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THE advent of Lawrence into Arabia was quite regular. He did not require "to make himself as obnoxious as possible to his military superiors," so that he might be allowed to go; nor was he granted leave "in the hope that he could be gently put out of the way." The Army has quite other methods for dealing with an obnoxious person, and they are neither gentle nor subtle. He did not wish to go: "I urged my complete unfitness for the job. I was unlike a soldier; hated soldiering." His chief, General Sir Gilbert Clayton, insisted: "so I had to go." <sup>6</sup> At this point the light begins to break on Colonel Lawrence, as upon one of his own rare specimens, when the superimposed rubbish has been removed. We begin to see him as one of the most interesting and engaging figures of the War, and not the charlatan the moving picture demands for a hero.

The wisdom of the choice is equally apparent.

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British government demands experts. A bureau of experts in Oriental affairs was set up in Cairo. At the head of the Arab bureau was Dr. D. G. Hogarth, a tremendous scholar, for twenty-four years an explorer in every part of Asia Minor, and keeper of the Ashmolean Museum for five. Lawrence was a member of his own College, and for six years his assistant; he spoke enough of the language; he knew the Arabs and could endure their way of life in the desert. In addition, as Lawrence writes, "I had been many years going up and down the Semitic East before the War, learning the manners of the villagers, tribesmen, and citizens of Syria and Mesopotamia; my poverty had constrained me to mix with the humbler classes, which enabled me to understand and think for the ignorant many as well as for the more enlightened." He arrived in Jiddah, the seaport of Mecca, in October 1916. His companion was Sir Ronald Storrs, Oriental Secretary to the Residency in Cairo, the confidential assistant of Sir Henry McMahon, the High Commissioner. At Jiddah they found Colonel C. E. Wilson, British representative with the new Arab State, installed in the Consulate. The visit was therefore not surrepti-

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tious; it was not the inspiration or origin of the Arab revolt.

The Arabs were always in revolt against the Turks; the revolt gained head after the Young Turks' revolution of 1908; in June 1916 it was openly proclaimed, and Mecca was captured by the Arabs. Turkey had been at war against the Allies since October 28th, 1914, for nearly two years, and there was nothing improper in offering aid to the Arabs; but England has always been chary in dealing with rebels. The young "Intrusives" in Cairo, of whom Lawrence was one, with a vision of a new Arabia, were not so cautious; but in the end England gave reluctant consent. This lack of enthusiasm for the Arabs in revolt is a grievance to Lawrence throughout his book, until he comes in contact with General Allenby. The truth is, the War Office had other preoccupations. There was a considerable war in France and Belgium; the gamble in the Dardanelles was a loss; the Salonika expedition a fiasco; the adventure to Mesopotamia ended in disaster at Kut-El-Amara. The opinion was growing that victory or defeat would be decided on the Western Front; and if the Turks must be fought, that, not

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the desert, was the field of choice. But the Arabs received generous assistance from the Navy, which had complete command of the Red Sea, and occupied every port from Jiddah to Akaba.

The English will not encourage rebellion, but when it is an accomplished fact from internal sources they do not hesitate to conform. In Cairo there was a growing perception of that powerful force, and the circle of Arabian well-wishers rapidly enlarged. Sir Archibald Murray, Admiral Wemyss, Sir Reginald Wingate, Sir Ronald Storrs, Sir George Lloyd, and all the Arabian scholars, including Hogarth and Lawrence, could now properly and openly declare themselves. The element of conspiracy had disappeared, although too late to prevent the recall of Sir Henry McMahon, whose conduct was held to have been premature. The English were not especially concerned with setting up a new Arab State; they doubted the capacity of the Arabs for any form of civilized government, or even for concerted military action.

Colonel Lawrence continually complains that the members of the military staff with whom he came in contact during the earlier period were something

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less than sympathetic towards his irregular form of warfare. But soldiering is a profession like medicine, law, or the priesthood; and all those professions have devised for themselves certain rules and conventions which long experience proves are essential for their operation in the interest of those whom they would serve. The military profession has rescued war from savagery, and developed the idea of chivalry even in the heat of action, demanding clemency to the defeated and solicitude for the wounded. When the professional spirit was at the best, an army in retreat would notify the enemy where it proposed to stand, and, it is affirmed, would then discuss which side was to fire first. By mutual agreement they went into winter quarters at the proper time, and in many campaigns were careful to acquire the goodwill of the civilian populace against the day they should require their hospitality again. Had this spirit prevailed in the recent war, the Germans would have discovered that they were defeated on the Marne. They would have gone home and paid for the damage they had done.

The British Staff were not mistaken in their surmise of cruelty and savagery on the part of the

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allies that were proposed to them. Worse still, they were aware that the spirit of cruelty soon infects civilized leaders. Colonel Lawrence supplies the proof: <sup>7</sup> "I ran down to the ruins to see what the mine had done. The bridge was gone; and into its gap was fallen the front wagon, which was filled with sick. The smash had killed all but three or four and had rolled dead and dying into a bleeding heap against the splintered end. One of those yet alive deliriously cried out the word 'typhus.' So I wedged shut the door, and left them there, alone." One who knows Lawrence well observes that the upper part of his face is kindly; the lower part severe, almost cruel. The narrative continues:

"To one side stood thirty or forty hysterical women, unveiled, tearing their clothes and hair; shrieking themselves distracted. The women rushed and caught at me with howls for mercy; but they would not get away till some husbands delivered me. These knocked their wives away and seized my feet in a very agony of terror. I kicked them off as well as I could with my bare feet." <sup>8</sup> "The Arabs, gone raving mad, were rushing about at top speed, bare-headed and half naked, screaming, shooting



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into the air, clawing one another nail and fist, while they staggered back and forward with immense bales which they ripped by the rail-side, smashing what they did not want." <sup>9</sup>

Upon another occasion,<sup>10</sup> "some of the Turkish wounded were too hurt to hold themselves on pillion. In the end we had to leave about twenty on the thick grass beside the rivulet, where at least they would not die of thirst, though there was little hope of rescue for them." Colonel Lawrence makes the comment, "A Turk so broken down was a nasty spectacle." To a person brought up merely on the Western Front the "nasty spectacle" is a British officer taking part in the spectacle; but one must make allowance for local circumstances. It was one from those parts who wrote, "The dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty." On the Western Front, possibly, one became too delicate, with shelter by night, regular meals by day, and the continued regard of other civilized men. There one fought not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers; and the spirit of humanity was never lost. A string of trolleys came into Mont St. Eloy laden with prisoners. They leaped down,

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eager for the hot food awaiting them. The sergeant in charge of the party had left his rifle in the front trolley. He called to the last prisoner, "Hi, there, Fritz, hand me down that gun, won't you? like a good fellow." A Sapper captain of proven courage came into the mess at Deutz, which is across the Rhine. "I taught these Germans a lesson," he said in anger; "a boy threw a tin can at my car." "What did you do?" one asked, in fear lest he may have shot the boy or run him through. For four years this captain had been breathing out threatenings against the hour of victory, and he had endured much: "I stopped the car, and made the boy take the tin can off the road," was his answer to the question. Between these two methods of warfare there is a great gulf fixed. The Turkish army was recruited largely from Arabia. It was notoriously cruel. Is it the Turk or the Arab who earned this distinction?—that is a fair subject of inquiry.

It is conduct such as Lawrence records that has brought all warfare into disrepute. But he and his companions had endured much; so much that one who has read the complete record doubts if the public censor would allow it to be published. He was

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compelled to kill his own wounded. "The Turks did not take Arab prisoners. Indeed, they used to kill them horribly, so, in mercy, we were finishing those of our badly wounded who would have to be left helpless on abandoned ground." <sup>11</sup> Those staff officers against whom Colonel Lawrence was complaining had served with and against similar troops in the Sudan, and did not like their methods. War to soldiers is like a duel governed by rules and conventions to distinguish an affair of honour from private murder. Indeed, law has grown up to replace private vengeance by an ordered procedure. The Spanish Inquisition itself began merely as an attempt to protect a private person from public vengeance. Even a civilized community may lapse into savagery, if one can believe the sworn evidence adduced in the Federal Courts of Pennsylvania during the present year against a secret society charged with burning at the stake five "offending citizens" in the civilized State of Texas.

Of necessity, the Arab revolt was banditry, not war; and banditry makes its own rules, as the German submarines made their own rules for the sinking of hospital ships. But those methods did not win

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the War, and it remains to deny the original necessity of using them. And, after all, wars are not won nor peace secured by the operation of savage tribes or by savage methods. The military result of this Arab revolt upon the War as a whole or upon the Turkish defeat in Palestine is a matter for technical history. The operations do not bulk very large in the official Record of General Allenby's Expeditionary Force, which includes his dispatches. A careful reading discloses the mention of Colonel Lawrence's name only twice, not in the dispatches, but once under date of October 1st, 1918, and on the following page in the narrative of events. Indeed, General Allenby's own campaign, and the value of it in the general strategy of the War, is a subject for the same historical appraisal. The supremacy of the Western Front is increasing as time goes on.

The world was taught to believe that Colonel Lawrence was the commander-in-chief of the Arab forces, which grew from four hundred to eleven thousand at the entry into Damascus; and that in his progress from Jiddah to the Jordan, it was he who inspired the tribes with a national idea to take up arms against the Turks. The explanation of his

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success is much simpler. The power of the British Empire was known to the most ignorant Arab; the guns of the British Navy were heard as far as the mountains; it was British gold that kept the revolt alive. Feisal was granted thirty thousand pounds a month. Colonel Lawrence was the channel through which that gold and power came. At one time he is reputed to have carried ten thousand pounds in each camel-bag, which would be four hundred pounds in weight, a considerable addition to the burden which even a camel can bear. On his own authority, he had at his personal credit three hundred thousand pounds. He was adviser, interpreter, liaison officer, and pay-master all in one. That will account for much.

He discovered at his first contact that Feisal's levies "were in wild spirits, shouting that the War might last ten years; it was the fattest time the hills had ever known; the Sherif was feeding not only the fighting men but their families, and paying two pounds a month for a man, four for a camel. Nothing else would have performed the miracle of keeping a tribal army in the field for five months on end." <sup>12</sup> He was under no delusion that the Arabs

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were awaiting a national Messiah, or that he was that one. At his first interview with General Allenby the utmost he offered was "to hobble the enemy by his preaching, if given stores and arms and a fund of two hundred thousand sovereigns to convince and control his converts."<sup>13</sup> And General Allenby gave what was asked. Again, Colonel Lawrence is too modest. Money does not answer all things. Without him to keep the money moving, the revolt would have stalled in the desert, as it did before his arrival on the scene. Without him as a leader—and the leadership he supplied was the only kind of leadership the Arabs would tolerate—the revolt would have ended in chaos.

For the first time, under his guidance, the Arabs had the chance to satiate their lust for cruelty against the Turks, and satisfy their passion for destruction and loot. Colonel Lawrence was known familiarly as the "train-wrecker," and he had ample scope against the line that ran nearly a thousand miles from Damascus to Medina. The editor of General Allenby's dispatches remarks that this train-wrecking "began to rank almost as a national sport," although he does not underestimate the im-



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portance of it. For this purpose Lawrence was provided with high explosives and electrical apparatus from the warships, and even trained personnel from the regular forces. He had the use of Stokes and Lewis guns, which were used to the immense delight of the Arabs and disaster to the Turkish troops endeavouring to escape from the wrecked trains.

The comment, up to this point, is merely a spoil-bank of rubbish, from which one may turn away with a gesture of impatience; but it puts an end to curiosity, and leaves one free to read the book, as one would read Shakespeare, careless of controversy, ignorant of history, detached from any reality that may surround or underlie the scene. And if the reader will not then know all that is to be known about Colonel Lawrence, he would learn nothing by seeing him in the flesh. This process of excavation has been tedious, like the labour of Colonel Lawrence himself when he sought to disinter some precious figure from the site of Carchemish. Even his own authentic English edition leaves some rubbish to be cleared away. It is defended by a publisher's note of correspondence between the proof-

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reader and the author upon the spelling of Arabic names; and this exquisite writer is introduced to us in terms of jargon—wash-out, rot, rather, good egg, and a jest that is not quite reassuring. And some future professor of English in a thesis upon the invasion of words from the lowest level of spoken speech into the written word will give full credit to this author.

Saul the son of Kish went into the desert in search of asses and found a kingdom: Colonel Lawrence went into the desert to found a nation and brought home a book, which by his affectation of secrecy he allowed to remain unknown and himself misjudged. A book shrouded in mystery demands every test for accuracy that can be applied to it from concomitant events or contemporary writings. A book that fails in one commonly fails in all, but this book stands every test. On July 4th, 1917, Colonel Lawrence recommended a night operation. The Chief refused on the ground that the full moon made the desert as light as day. He was assured that the moon would be in eclipse, and the operation was carried to success. A reference to the Nautical Almanac for that day and year proves that in

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Arabia the eclipse began at 11.15 at night and lasted until 1.27 in the morning.

Any writing about the desert is sure of readers, since the desert is the most familiar part of the earth's surface. It is the origin of the three serious religions of the world. Christians, Jews, and Mohammedans associate the desert with their earliest reading. It will be recognized the moment it is seen, as a camel or an elephant is instantly known for what they are. The sea is not so readily accepted; it is unstable, and it is bitter, not salt, as inland people suppose. All three religions are based upon the hope of a future life in contrast with the misery and worthlessness of this. That idea would never occur to a dweller in the beauty and richness of England; but to the dweller in the desert life is not explicable by this world alone. It is well known, too, that when God appeared to man, the appearance was always to an Arabian, and the inference is that they alone were worthy of that manifestation. From the conduct of the Arabs, as described by Colonel Lawrence, it would appear that no people ever stood in more dire need of a divine warning; and if we can trust to the evidence

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of their own scriptures no people ever profited less.

Nor is it what Lawrence saw in the desert that gives value to this book; it is what he thought of the things he saw. They passed through his mind. The desert and all that it contains have been described a hundred times, but never so delicately or with so sure a touch. He describes not things themselves, but the inner meaning and beauty that lie in them. The mid-day heat; the blaze of sun on basalt, rock, or sand; the abomination of desolation; the pain of body; the glare from shining mud; the blackness of night and the brilliancy of stars; the cold of snow; the small grass that comes in a green shimmer after rain; the rich herbage along the rivulets—any one may see these, but Lawrence saw them through different eyes, through the eyes of a patriarch or prophetic Arab, and in detail, as one might say, through the eyes of a camel. Any man may walk in the woods: it is given to few to see what Orlando saw in the Forest of Arden.

It is a matter for wonder why all explorers write so well. The surmise is that they learn to write in the waste places they frequent. The truth is, they

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explore because they can write, and are in search of new scenes and strange experiences to write about. They have a curiosity about life, a restlessness of mind, and a desire for notoriety. Some are driven by a passion for pure contemplation, for the preaching of some gospel, by the romantic instinct, by the love of adventure in itself; but these are rare, and speechless on their return. A really great writer, especially if he is a poet, does not go very far. In a casual ale-house, from the few chance words of a traveller, he will secure a segment of experience from which he can construct the whole circle, but that power to integrate is the prerogative of genius. All these qualities were present in the mind of Colonel Lawrence, except the last; he must see for himself with his own eyes. But he cannot stand back from the scene; he must make himself a part of it. It is on the field of war there is the most ample room for the exercise of this spirit of restlessness and adventure; for the primitive desire to destroy and be destroyed, to abound and be abased, and all with a clean conscience and sense of virtue; for it is easy for the soldier to persuade himself that he is doing something useful.

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Colonel Lawrence had the capacity of the artist for entering into a situation and being the character he assumed. To the Arabs he became as an Arab; to them that were without the law as without law; all things to all those men. And when he came amongst civilized men, he found it hard to put off the character he had so long assumed. He continued to wear native dress; he would squat on the floor rather than sit on a chair. When he returned to England he retained his wayward habits, sleeping by day and eating the strange food to be found in English railway restaurants by night. He had a passion for the bizarre, the romantic, the picturesque, and he invested the Arabs with those qualities, although an Arab on a camel is not more romantic or picturesque than a costermonger on a donkey. Yet the mood helped him to endure.

*Onager—assuetus in solitudine*, the motto from Jeremiah, is singularly ill-chosen by Mr. Graves for his book. Neither implication applies in the slightest to Colonel Lawrence. Of all men he was the least "wild." He had one relentless purpose, to animate the Arabs with a national spirit and lead them in triumph into Damascus. The hardest task was the



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subjugation of his own spirit to their mood and to their way of life. But of this loathsome living he makes no complaint. He had subdued himself to his purpose. Over the foul details he casts, with the sure and delicate hand of the artist, a veil of beauty. What lay beneath, what his sensitive spirit endured, is there for any sensitive reader to discover. The domestic savagery, the obscene companionship, the sacrifice of his private life were enough to daunt a mind less controlled. In addition, he was compelled to contend with treachery by affecting to believe it did not exist. The Arabs would have sold him to the Turks, had he not delicately suggested to them that they would not be paid the price.

For him the fortitude of an Arab was not enough. He bore a greater burden. "Among the Arabs there were no distinctions, traditional or natural, except the unconscious power given a famous sheikh by virtue of his accomplishment; and they taught me that no man could be their leader except he ate the rank's food, wore their clothes, lived level with them, and yet appeared better in himself."<sup>14</sup> On a march in "the veritable Desert,"<sup>15</sup> from some chance food "a stink like a pestilence went across

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our party." The march continued. "It was a breathless wind with the furnace taste, so dry that our shrivelled lips cracked open, and the skin of our faces chapped; while our eyelids, gone granular, seem to creep back, and bare our shrinking eyes. Nothing made us widen an eye or think a thought till evening, calm and black and full of stars, had come down on us. We had covered fifty miles, so we halted." <sup>16</sup>

During this march a man disappeared, "a gap-toothed, grumbling fellow, bad-tempered, suspicious, brutal." He was an ill-natured stranger, with no claim on the Arabs, and they did not care what became of him. Indeed, he may have been killed by one of the party who owed him a grudge. For a moment Lawrence thought of mounting one of his trudging men on his own camel to return in search of the straggler; but with that keen, indomitable mind of his he perceived: "My shirking the duty would be understood because I was a foreigner; but that was precisely the plea I did not dare set up. I should make it impossible for myself if I claimed simultaneously the privilege of both societies." He went himself, and brought in the wretched man. He

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was now in a position to hurl "jests and scoffs at the Arabs for abandoning a friend in the desert."<sup>17</sup> Again,<sup>18</sup> Salem was wounded and missing. Lawrence with twelve volunteers rode back, but the field was in possession of the Turks, and the man must be dead. Later he discovered one of Feisal's freedmen, "and on the crupper, strapped to him soaked with blood, unconscious, was the missing Salem. When he recovered, he bore me always a little grudge for having left him behind when he was of my company and wounded. I had failed in staunchness." This was "the pitiless Arab standard with its no-mercy for foreigners who wore its clothes," by which he was measured for two years.

Colonel Lawrence traverses every mood from ecstasy to despair, but even in his suffering there is ecstasy, *l'ivresse d'angoisse*. Indeed, one begins to suspect that much of the suffering he endured was a kind of wilful self-immolation. There is something confirmatory of this in the argument he used to combat the crude prudence of a tribe which had not enjoyed the long sojourn of himself and his companions in the clarifying wilderness:

"Life in the mass is sensual only; there are no

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rest-houses for revolt; its spirit is accretive, to endure as far as the senses would endure, and to use each advance as base for further adventure, deeper privation, sharper pain. Failure seems God's freedom to mankind. Omnipotence and the Infinite are our two worthiest foemen, indeed the only ones for a full man to meet, they being monsters of his own spirit's making. In fighting Omnipotence, honour is to throw away the poor resources we have, and dare Him empty-handed." <sup>19</sup>

This warfare between the spirit and the flesh runs through the book. It is the familiar theme of the whole hagiology. St. Paul goes so far as to say: *Qui autem sunt Christi, carnem suam crucifixerunt cum vitiis et concupiscentiis*. Colonel Lawrence transfers the revolt in the desert to the citadel of his own mind, and one may hazard the guess that this is the secret theme of his book. One or two of the desperate rides he undertook had no earthly purpose. It is a dark saying that the cruelties the saints were willing to practise upon themselves they were only too willing to see inflicted upon others. Certainly, he observed with remarkable stoicism the

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cruelties inflicted upon the Turkish sick and prisoners.

He had mastered the Arabs in their own feats of endurance. That sense of ease passed over into playfulness. Possibly there was the added incentive of justifying to himself as well as to his companions that slight body of his, for he was only five feet three inches in height, and weighed less than a hundred pounds. On a ride with two English sergeants, "the stifling air was like a metal mask over our faces; it was admirable to see them struggle not to speak of it, that they might endure as firmly as the Arabs; but the Arabs themselves were loud against the tyrannous sun and the breathlessness; for effect, I played about, seeming to enjoy myself."<sup>20</sup> Whatever the motive, the effect upon the Arabs was the conviction that here was a body and mind superior to their own. That was the cause of his ascendancy. Again, upon a famous ride<sup>21</sup> with Rahail alone: "That young man had maddened all of us for months by his abundant vigour, and by laughing at our weakness; so this time I was determined to ride him out, showing no mercy. Before dawn, he was blubbering with self-pity; but

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softly, lest I hear him." When the Arab was past protest, "he rode beside me, white-faced, bleak, and silent, wrought up only to outstay me, beginning to take a half pride in his pain." But Lawrence glories in his own pain:

"I seemed at last approaching the insensibility which had always been beyond my reach: but a delectable land for one born so slug-tissued that nothing this side fainting would let his spirit free. Now I found myself dividing into parts. There was one which went on riding wisely, sparing or helping every pace of the wearied camel. Another hovering above and to the right bent down curiously, and asked what the flesh was doing. The flesh gave no answer, for, indeed, it was conscious only of a ruling impulse to keep on and on; but a third garrulous one talked and wondered, critical of the body's self-inflicted labour, and contemptuous of the reason for effort." <sup>22</sup>

And yet, in the midst of this searching analysis of the ascetic spirit, the analyst with bodily eyes could see "dawn in Jefer come imperceptibly through the mist like a ghost of sunlight, which left the earth untouched; our shadows had no edge; we



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doubted if that faint stain upon the soil was cast by us or not."

The book abounds in swift miniatures: Sir Archibald Murray—all brains and claws, nervous, elastic, changeable; Lynden Bell, so solidly built up of layers of professional opinion glued together after Government testing and approval, and later trimmed and polished to standard pitch; <sup>23</sup> Boyle—sat on the shadow side of his bridge, reading too intently to spare more than fourteen words a day; <sup>24</sup> Admiral Wemyss—with his active mind and broad intelligence, had given the Arabs guns and machine-guns, landing parties and technical help. General Allenby—heavy, rubicund, newly from France, physically large and confident, and morally so great that the comprehension of our littleness came slow to him, yet hardly prepared for anything so odd as myself—a little bare-footed, silk-skirted man; he did not ask many questions, nor talk much; at the end he put up his chin, and said quite directly, "Well, I will do for you what I can." <sup>25</sup> Two Arab portraits from his long gallery must suffice: Feisal—very tall and pillar-like, very slender, in his long white silk robes and his brown headcloth bound with a bril-

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liant scarlet and gold cord; his eyelids were dropped; and his black beard and colourless face were like a mask against the strange still watchfulness of his body; his hands were crossed in front of him on his dagger.<sup>26</sup> And Auda—simply dressed, northern fashion, in white cotton with a red Mosul headcloth, large eloquent eyes, like black velvet in richness; his forehead low and broad; his nose very high and sharp, powerfully hooked; his mouth rather large and mobile; his beard and moustaches trimmed to a point, with the lower jaw shaven underneath.

If any one ask what is meant by writing prose as Shakespeare would write, this passage will serve: "Suddenly Auda scrambled to his feet with a loud 'God forbid,' and flung from the tent. We stared at one another, and there came a noise of hammering outside. I went after to learn what it meant, and there was Auda bent over a rock pounding his false teeth to fragments with a stone. 'I had forgotten,' he explained, 'Jemal Pasha gave me these. I was eating my Lord's bread with Turkish teeth'; unfortunately he had few teeth of his own, so that henceforward eating the meat he loved was difficulty and

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after-pain, and he went about half-nourished till we had taken Akaba, and Sir Reginald Wingate sent him a dentist from Egypt to make an Allied set.”<sup>27</sup>

“Brown like old leaves” is an authentic touch in the description of a feast that would have rejoiced the heart of Rabelais.<sup>28</sup> “The bowl was now brim-full, ringed round its edge by white rice in an embankment a foot wide and six inches deep, filled with legs and ribs of mutton till they toppled over. It needed two or three victims to make in the centre a dressed pyramid of meat such as honour prescribed. The centre-pieces were boiled, upturned heads, propped on their severed stumps of neck, so that the ears, brown like old leaves, flapped out on the rice surface.”

Soldiers make war: historians make history. From history men learn of warfare; they learn war only from war itself. Therefore any history of war is of small military value. The principles are too well known and too easily forgotten. It is of no further value unless it is expressed in terms of literature by which alone the mind is enlarged and enriched. This book by Colonel Lawrence has only the military value inherent in the peculiar operations which

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it describes. The real value lies in the art with which he has written. Anything can be defined: nothing can be explained, least of all a man. Colonel Lawrence has achieved his desire, a place with the artists. His book is open. All that now remains is to read, and grant to him the only wish he ever expressed: "To be forgotten by my friends,"—until the time comes for a fresh exploit.

### III. COLONEL LAWRENCE

#### *References to Revolt in the Desert..*

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